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THE SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Scottish Bird News

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Oil and troubled waters

Recently TV pictures have again drawn attention to the damage that can be inflicted on wildlife, including birds, by careless handling of oil cargoes at sea. The Sea Empress ran aground on the Welsh coast but the incident has obvious parallels for Scotland especially following the Braer incident in Shetland. The fact that environmental damage from the Braer was less than most people had feared seems to have been the excuse for inertia, even complacency, from those in authority.

The Sea Empress spill

On 15 February 1996 this tanker, carrying 130,000 tonnes of light crude oil from the Forties field in the North Sea, ran aground outside Milford Haven in west Wales. An estimated 65,000 tonnes of oil was spilt from the Sea Empress, creating large slicks and polluting beaches for 35 miles off the south Pembrokeshire coast between Skomer, a Marine Nature Reserve, and Carmarthen Bay. The area is one of the most important in Britain for marine life, and experts think the spill is the biggest environmental disaster since the Torrey Canyon in 1967. By the end of the month an estimated 20,000 seabirds had been affected by oil. The full extent of the effects on wildlife, fisheries and the tourist industry will not be known for some time.

The Braer

This latest disaster has highlighted the fact that little has been done to improve shipping safety in British waters following the publication of Lord Donaldson's report after the Braer disaster in Shetland 3 years ago. In Scotland the only action has been to station a tug at Stornoway during the winter to cover the Minch, a particularly sensitive area for wildlife which carries substantial marine traffic. Calum Macdonald, MP for the Western Isles, has repeated a list of demands made at the time of the Braer sinking. These include:

- The Minch should be declared a Maritime High Risk Area
- Ships should be banned from using the Minch in all but the most dangerous weather conditions
- Any ships using the Minch should be piloted
- The tug at Stornoway should be on station all year.

Common Scoter — Stan da Prato

This species suffered in the Welsh spill and also occurs off the Scottish coast

Figures from Stornoway coastguard show that in January 1996 alone, 93 vessels reported their presence in the Minch, although not obliged to do so. The currents throughout the Minch are particularly complex so any oil spill on the scale of that in Pembrokeshire could affect a very wide area.

Stunningly complacent

According to press reports Sir George Young, the Transport Secretary, was described as "stunningly complacent" by opposition MPs for refusing to broaden the official investigation into the Sea Empress accident to a full public inquiry into the safety of oil tanker traffic around Britain.

The Sea Empress is said to be the twelfth oil tanker to run aground in British waters in the last 2 years, while an editorial in the New Scientist pointed out that, of 15 supertanker spills of more than 60,000 tonnes, 3 have been off the British coast.

West coast oil

A related concern is for the environment of the Western Isles, when oil exploration starts in the west in the next round of oil and gas licensing. It is to be hoped that experience gained in Orkney & Shetland will be applied in the Hebrides.

Stan da Prato

Girvan oil spill

During late December 1995 an oil spill occurred at Girvan Mains just north of Girvan. The spill came from an outfall pipe serving a local industrial estate and the oil involved was heavy duty heating oil. This outfall attracts large numbers of seaduck due to distillery waste. As the spill happened during a period of calm weather the majority of ducks affected were those in the immediate vicinity. Eider were the most affected species with around 70 picked up alive and around 200 being found dead. However, around 50% of the 1200-1500 Eiders present were thought to be oiled. Smaller numbers of other species were also affected including Goldeneye, Scaup, Pochard, Red-breasted Merganser and Black-throated Diver as well as various gull species. Due to the strong south easterly winds following the spill the oil did not come ashore. The majority of birds recovered were found by volunteers and live birds were passed on to Hessilhead Wildlife Rescue Centre at Beith or the SSPCA via the Veterinary Services Dept at SAC Auchincruive. Perhaps the most unfortunate aspect of this spill was the delay on news of the spill being passed on to the RSPB which led to a delay of over a week in any organised attempt to recover birds. Hopefully, things will be more organised in future should any similar incidents occur.

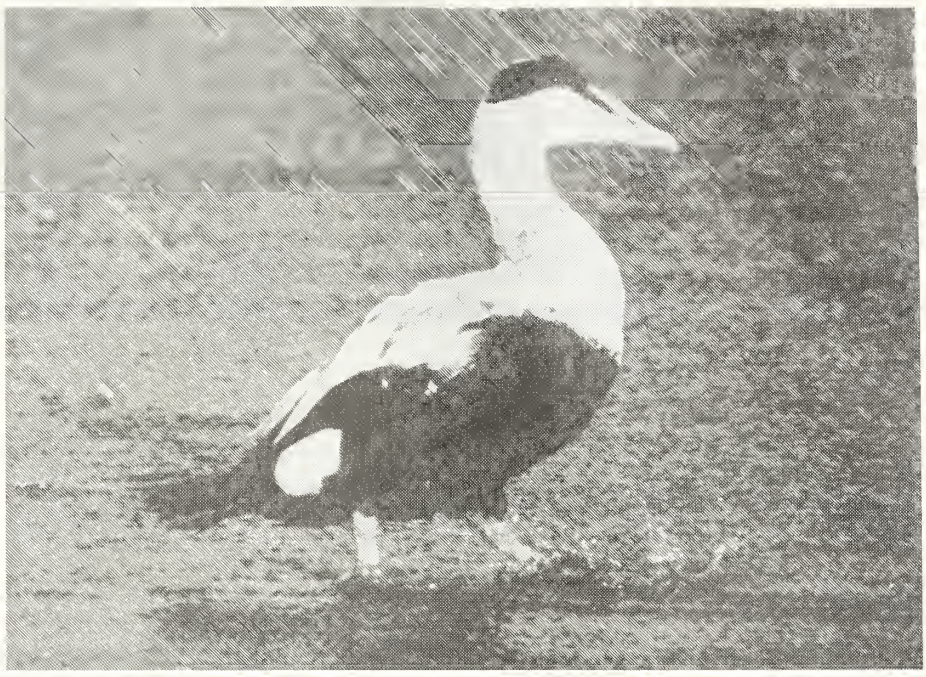
Andrew Stevenson

Scottish Natural Heritage cave in on Cairngorm

As this issue is about to go to the printer the board of Scottish Natural Heritage has announced that it is withdrawing its objection to the building of a funicular railway on Cairngorm (see March issue). Although SNH say that they will insist on stringent conditions the decision has been met with dismay by voluntary conservation organisations who regard the scheme as unworkable in principle as well as a very doubtful use of public money.

We do not know whether SNH's change of position means that planning permission will now be granted without the issue going to public inquiry. This is still possible, especially as there is an international dimension for the case and the European Union may well become involved.

Meanwhile SNH's decission will be widely interpreted as bowing to political pressure.



Eider drake in moult

Stan da Prato

The Cromarty Firth

A new partnership approach is to be taken to manage the coastal environment of the Cromarty Firth. The preparation of a Management Strategy is being coordinated by the Cromarty Firth Liaison Group, which includes 9 organisations with responsibilities within the Firth. The Strategy aims to promote the maintenance and enhancement of the natural, economic and cultural resources of the Firth. Regarded as one of the finest natural harbours in Britain, it is an important location for the development of port facilities and the oil related industries. At the same time, the Firth supports a rich and varied wildlife, with much of its coastline designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest on account of its importance for wintering and migrating birds.

The Liaison Group was formed in 1992 and has already brought together a wide range of bodies to discuss common interests and share information about the Firth. One of the priorities for the Group over the coming months will be to work with local communities and to engage their support, whilst involving them in the whole process of shaping the Management Strategy. This will be initiated through the promotion of meetings and workshops to explore the future of the Firth.

Anyone who is interested in the Firth and wants to be involved can get more information from the Project Officers: **Jenny Crawford 01463 702279** or **Rachel Harding-Hill 01463 712221.**

Millennium coast project

Detailed proposals for coastal projects, costing £50 million, have been submitted to the Millennium Fund by the tourist boards of Scotland, Wales and England. In Scotland these include a package of projects by the RSPB to improve the coastal environment for many bird species and provide facilities for visitors to view wildlife. A "coastal renaissance" is proposed for Fife, involving the revival of coastal communities, a network of coastal footpaths, and the establishment of nature reserves and viewing points. Other schemes include nature reserves near Findhorn and Wigtown (see page 3) and a seabird centre in East Lothian (see below).

Seabird centre

Lothian and Edinburgh Enterprise Ltd, Edinburgh Council and SNH are jointly funding a study into the viability of a £1 million centre for seabirds at North Berwick in East Lothian. Plans include installing remote controlled television cameras to look at Gannets on Bass Rock and Puffins on Fidra.

Stan an Armin

When proof reading the paper on the Gannets of St Kilda, which is published in the current issue of Scottish Birds the authors were alarmed to find that one of the archipelagoes famous stacks had changed its name - to that of the editor. "Surely he isn't that big" was the less than sympathetic comment.

Wigtown Bay Local Nature Reserve

During the 1980's Dumfries and Galloway Regional Council was approached by individuals and organisations in Wigtownshire with a request to consider the creation of a Local Nature Reserve in Wigtown Bay. The pressure for action to be taken was in response to local concerns about uncontrolled shooting and worries about the possible deterioration of the environment in the Bay.

As early as 1958 the importance of the Bay was recognised when it was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest. In recent years the Bay has been proposed as a Special Protection Area under European legislation and also as a Ramsar site because of its importance to migrating birds. The complex system of saltmarsh and mud-flats in and around the Bay creates an area of international importance for wildlife - particularly as an over wintering site for Pink-footed Geese and of national importance for a variety of waders. The waters of the Bay and the Cree and Bladnoch Rivers are thought to provide the spawning grounds for rare fish such as Sparling, Alice Shad and Twaite Shad.

In 1988 the Advisory Management Committee for Wigtown Bay was formed. The Committee included local landowners, farmers and councillors, the Wigtown Bay Wildfowlers Club, BASC, RSPB, SWT and what is now SNH.

In 1989 a Warden was appointed. The management plan outlines proposals for enhancing the estuary as an area where wildfowl and waders can feed, roost and breed. There will be quiet periods when birds are not disturbed. The estuary will be maintained so far as is possible as a wild land area. A large part of the Reserve is to be set aside as a sanctuary area which people will be encouraged to avoid. This will allow the birds and other animals to feed in peace.

The plan also allows for traditional wildfowling to continue. The plan outlines a system of permit shooting and proposes bye laws to control various activities in and around the Bay. Permits will be required, for example, for bait digging, rod fishing, cockle collecting and scientific surveys. Traditional access routes will be protected and maintained. The establishment of the Local Nature Reserve has required the agreement of 17 different landowners. Many of the principal landowners farm the extensive merse lands which surround the Bay. The grazing of cattle and sheep plays an important part in ensuring that the inter tidal areas are kept in good condition for the wildlife. Securing the agreement of all the landowners has been a protracted exercise but with the agreements now in place the way is clear to establish a local Reserve which will be the biggest of its type in the United Kingdom.

Access agreements with the farmers include proposals to improve access routes by providing stiles, gates and bridges where necessary, erecting information notices, and providing hides. There are also possibilities of establishing a wildlife centre which will provide a base for the Council's Ranger Service and voluntary wardens for the bay. Much of the interest of the Bay is in winter when birds are present in very large numbers. The prospects of improving the visitor interest at other seasons by providing a centre based on the wildlife resource of the bay is currently being investigated. The proposal for the establishment of a 'saltmarsh centre' has already been the subject of interest from the Scottish Tourist Board who are compiling a bid for Millennium funding under the heading "A Celebration of the Coast".

Ringed Plover David Mitchell

Charles Frank

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No cull of birds of prey

According to press reports, those hoping for a cull of birds of prey to protect grouse and other gamebirds have been told they have no chance of success. A private report prepared for the Scottish Landowners Federation is said to make disappointing reading for landowners keen to reintroduce legal shooting and trapping of raptors.

Not only is there no scientific evidence to back their case, says the SLF's former legal advisor Duncan Thomson, but even if there was, existing British and European law would never allow a cull to take place. The report was leaked to New Scientist magazine.

Mr Thomson's report spells out the many obstacles to the issue of licences for shooting birds of prey. He says that, even if convincing evidence existed, the present law insists that all other reasonable methods would have to be tried, and it must be shown that a controlled cull would actually solve the problem. Because raptors are territorial, other birds would simply move in to take the place of those killed. "There is at present no sound scientific evidence to support claims that raptors are endangering the survival of a sustainable grouse population," says Mr Thomson in the report. "In any event it is not appropriate to permit licensed culling of raptors in order to replace raptors as predator with man as predator".

He predicts that no Secretary of State would ever allow a cull to take place even if the law and science supported such a move, because public opinion would not condone it.

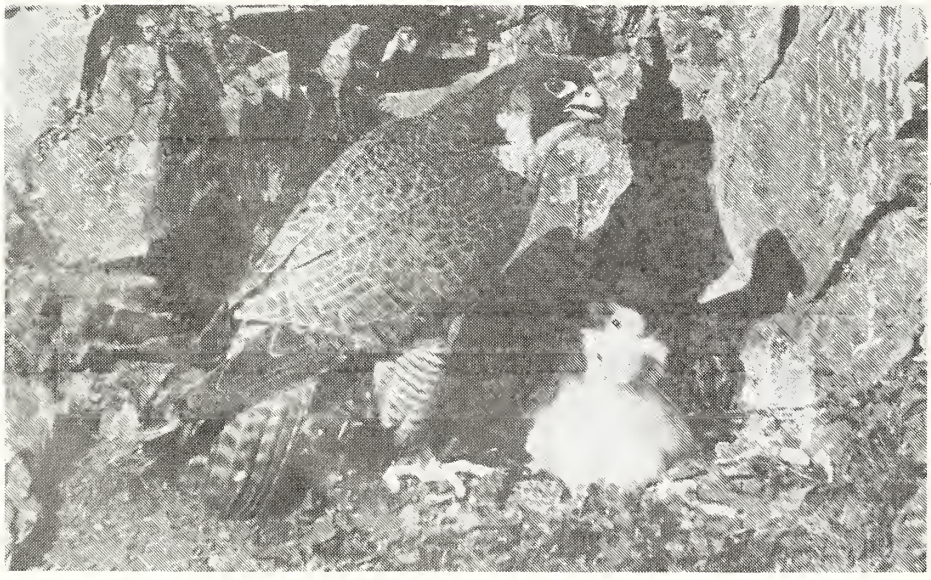
SOC member the victim of vandalism

Police wildlife officers in Perthshire have issued a warning to those responsible for the continuing killing of raptors following a mindless act of vandalism at the garden of SOC member and raptor enthusiast Wendy Mattingley.

Wendy, who owns Cluny House Gardens near Aberfeldy with her husband John, has recently had the initials RSPB sprayed in weedkiller on the lawn. A further £5000 worth of damage has been done to plants in the potting shed. Wendy has worked for the RSPB monitoring raptors in Tayside.

Police wildlife officer Alan Stewart stated that poisoning cases in the Aberfeldy area had "got out of hand" in recent years with over 15 cases being reported. "These have included Golden Eagle, Buzzard, Tawny Owl, Sparrowhawk, a pet cat and a farm collie". Several people have suffered near fatal symptons after handling poisoned bait. Members of the public have been warned to take great care if they come across a suspicious looking carcase. Some of the poisons used can be absorbed through the skin. Suspicious carcases should only be handled using non absorbent gloves. Most incidents of this type are on land which is associated with shooting interests.

Outlining the potential penalties poisoning culprits face, Inspector Stewart stressed, that anyone convicted of indiscriminate poisoning might not be considered a "fit and proper person" to hold a firearms or shotgun certificate.



Peregrine Jim Young

Eagle dies in trap

A young Golden Eagle starved to death after being trapped in a cage set up to catch crows on a shooting estate between Blairgowrie and Pitlochry. The RSPB has said that the death had been caused by gross neglect rather than illegal activities. There is usually no problem with these traps, which are widely used by gamekeepers and shepherds, if used properly. Although other birds could become trapped, regular daily checks should ensure that they are released unharmed. However this bird was drastically underweight with injuries to its beak and wings. Dave Dick, RSPB Investigations Officer, commented: "Signs suggest the poor creature died of starvation after struggling to get out of the wire cage for more than a week, which makes this incident particularly horrific". RSPB will now lobby government for laws to require that crow traps should be checked daily or have the main door padlocked open when they are not in use. Police have investigated the incident, but will take no further action having concluded that it was an unfortunate accident. The young eagle was hatched last year in the Queen Elizabeth Forest Park near Aberfoyle.

Wildlife protection officers

Tayside Police have appointed 11 more wildlife protection officers, to add to the 3 already in post in the region. The posts are voluntary and take up only a proportion of the officers' time, but each officer is responsible for wildlife matters within his or her own section.

Eyes in the sky!

A pigeon fancier in South Wales has devised a way to protect his birds from attack by Peregrines; he has painted red white and blue RAF roundels on the top side of his birds' wings. Tom Perry, secretary of the Rhymney Gwent Flying Club told the Western Mail The pigeons look like small Spitfires from above and it's enough to put the falcons off".

It seems to work. Mr Perry, a retired miner, say he has not lost one since the wing painting began. The system works, he believes, because the Peregrines mistake the RAF markings for very large eyes. "Moths and butterflies have large imitation eyes on their wings and this helps deter or confuse the predators".

Ne-erday birds

To kick off the celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the foundation of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club a New Year Bird Count was organised. It is a long established habit of Scottish birdwatchers to start their year list on the 1st (or 2nd!) of January. I thought that many members might like to take part in a midwinter count, loosely based on the American Christmas Bird Counts. In North America there have been bird counts during the Christmas period, organised by the National Audubon Society, since the turn of the century. These counts produce useful data about the changes in the distribution and numbers of birds across the North American continent, or at least the populated parts of it, in the midwinter period

Severe weather

A total of 87 observers took part and they covered 83 tetrads, observing a total of 143 species. Not everyone restricted themselves to the first 2 or 3 days in January but almost all of the counts were carried out in the first half of the month. One of the reasons for this may be that the weather around the New Year period was rather severe. The snowy landscapes that many counters reported were more reminiscent of the Arctic than Scotland.

To participate each counter chose a tetrad made up of any connecting 1km squares in their local area or, if they were on holiday, then they could choose an area near where they were staying.

To complete the count the counter chose a route through the tetrad and counted or estimated the numbers of each species encountered. A count form was included with the December issue of SBN. The count should have been completed during the New Year holidays and the idea behind it was to provide a snapshot of Scotland's midwinter birds. The unusually severe weather meant that many counters waited until after the thaw to count their tetrad.

Counts came from almost all areas of mainland Scotland from Wigtownshire to Caithness with one each from Lewis and Eigg. Unfortunately we received no counts from Moray & Nairn, Orkney or Shetland. One counter covered 4 tetrads, although she recorded no birds in 2 of these which were in the Highland areas of southwest Perthshire and Stirlingshire. Other counters saw many more species of birds in their tetrads with one in Fife getting a total of 83 species. Tetrads in Lothian and Dumfries and Galloway each produced 71 species.

Results

The results on their own are not too meaningful and it would need repeat counts to be carried out in the future before any trends could be discerned.
Table 1 summarises the returns from each recording area. The mean is the average of the total number of species seen in each tetrad.

Area	No. observers	No. of tetrads covered	No of species			
			total	max	min	mean
D & G	7	8	84	71	13	36
Borders	12	11	65	47	6	25
Ayr	4	4	67	58	14	33
Lothian	19	16	105	71	11	30
Clyde	4	3	41	23	20	22
Central	3	2	25	25	0	13
Argyll	2	2	47	36	23	29
Fife	7	7	105	83	35	45
P & K	4	5	49	30	0	29
A & D	3	3	53	46	18	35
North east	8	7	87	55	6	34
I & R	9	10	88	61	3	31
Sutherland	2	2	36	29	20	25
Caithness	2	2	44	40	23	31
OH	1	1	19	19	19	19
Total	**87**	**83**				

D & G = Dumfries & Galloway, P & K = Perth & Kinross, A & D = Angus & Dundee, I & R = Inverness & Ross, OH = Outer Hebrides

The recording area which had the most tetrads covered and the highest number of observers was Lothian. That area and Fife shared the highest number of species seen with 105 species. The highest mean number of species per tetrad came from Fife but this may be caused by the low number of tetrads counted and observers' choice of rich coastal habitats. In Lothian a far wider range of habitats, including upland and urban areas were counted, leading to a lower mean number of species per tetrad.

In Borders only one coastal tetrad was counted and, again, a variety of habitats was surveyed leading to a wide range in the numbers of species per tetrad. In general it appeared that the higher the number of observers covering the widest range of habitats then the lower the mean number of species per tetrad was.

Variation

This table also shows that the east coast appears to be richer than the west coast in winter and that, as expected, those areas with a long, varied coastline have a higher diversity than predominantly inland or mainly upland areas. The richest areas appear to be those which are situated in the most productive farmland in the eastern coastal plain and the south west. In the north and west the diversity is lower. In Central and Perth & Kinross the low number of species/tetrad is due to counters going to remote upland areas where very few species could be expected, especially in the severe weather of the 1995/96 winter.

Small sample

These results are based on a small sample. The weather this midwinter was unusually severe and this may not represent a true picture of Scottish winter birds. If we can repeat these counts then we may have a better source of information about the populations of birds which winter in Scotland. We already have good information about big and obvious species such as wildfowl and waders through the Wetland Bird Survey but, as any local recorder or bird report editor will tell you,

getting information about the smaller and commoner species is difficult. With that in mind copies of the count forms submitted by the observers will be passed to the recorders for the areas where counts were made.

Top ten species

The most widespread species recorded on the count were:

	Species	No. of tetrads	% of total
1	Blackbird	74	89
2	Carrion/Hooded Crow	72	86
3	Chaffinch	69	83
4	Robin	67	80
5	Blue Tit	62	75
6	Starling	61	73
7	Woodpigeon	58	70
8=	Dunnock	53	64
8=	Great Tit	53	64
8=	Rook	53	64

All of these species, except Woodpigeon, are passerines and all are to a greater or lesser extent resident in Scotland. These species are common breeding birds in Scotland too, although some such as Blackbird, Robin and Chaffinch have their winter populations increased by immigrants from continental Europe. All of these species are typical birds of farmland, parkland and suburban areas and may reflect a bias in the areas observers chose to count in.

Numerous species

The 10 most numerous species found on the count are shown in the table below:

	Species	Total Nos	No. of tetrads
1	Rook	3883	53
2	Skylark	3684	22
3	Black headed Gull	3675	45
4	Oystercatcher	3559	29
5	Herring Gull	3093	48
6	Eider	2572	18
7	Common Gull	2506	44
8	Starling	2432	61
9	Woodpigeon	2081	58
10	Chaffinch	1973	69

Flocks

All of these are flocking species. Skylark reaches this table as a result of a single flock of over 3,000 birds! The remaining species are all easily visible birds which gather in large flocks which can be easily counted. This table would be different if any counts had been received from major goose roosts. It is also possible that the freezing weather had caused large numbers of waders and wildfowl to move out of Scotland altogether and in a 'normal' winter the 'most numerous' species would be different.

Scarce species

The table below shows the least frequent species which were observed on the count:

Nos observed	Species
1	Smew
1	Goshawk
1	Jack Snipe
1	Spotted Redshank
1	Short-eared Owl
1	Kingfisher
2	Shoveler
2	Black Guillemot
2	Green Woodpecker
2	Willow Tit
2	Chough
2	Snow Bunting

Goshawk, Jack Snipe and Green Woodpecker are all uncommon and reatively difficult to see, although it may have been expected that Green Woodpecker would have been more widespread. The scarcity of Black Guillemot reflects the eastern bias in the distribution of observers. Short-eared Owls were obviously scarce in 1995/96, possibly due to prolonged snow cover. Kingfisher and Shoveler would both have been adversely affected by the severe weather while Willow Tit and Chough are scarce and localised species in Scotland. The biggest surprise is the scarcity of Snow Buntings. There is no obvious explanation for this.

The least widespread species also includes species recorded from only one tetrad. These were Black-necked Grebe, Gannet, Bewick's Swan, White-fronted Goose, Surf Scoter, Black Grouse, Ruff, Chough, Common Crossbill and Corn Bunting. The scarcity of White-fronted Goose, Black Grouse and Common Crossbill probably reflects the eastern and coastal bias in the numbers of observers and their choice of habitats to count in. Corn Bunting has become uncommon in most areas of eastern Scotland. The rest of these species, other than Chough, are rare to uncommon winter visitors to Scotland and it is not surprising that they were recorded in so few tetrads.

Thanks

Thanks to everyone who took part and I hope that everyone who took part enjoyed the counts, despite the Siberian weather conditions. I also hope that they will be willing to repeat them next year and that more people will take part.

David J Kelly

Goshawk Doug Weir

Press round up

We are again indebted to SCENES, an independant digest of Scottish environmental issues which covers published material on the Scottish environment. The SOC Library has a reciprocal arrangement whereby Scottish Bird News is exchanged for SCENES. We can only reprint a small selection of articles most relevant to ornithology.

Anyone wanting a specimen copy and subscription details should write, phone or fax to **Michael & Sue Scott, Editors SCENES, Strome House, North Strome, Lochcarron, Ross-shire IV54 8YJ. (tel: 01520 722588; fax: 01520 722660).**

Forestry policy criticisms

In an article in The Scotsman, Donald Young, a former chief executive of Central Scotland Woodlands, criticised the effectiveness of plans for new national and community forests. He wrote: "The millions of pounds currently spent each year are being frittered away on highly expensive dribs and drabs of small woods which will deliver few of the landscape, nature, recreation and timber benefits desired from the new forests". He argued that this lack of success was not due to lack of commitment, effort or even resources, suggesting that the resources would be more than adequate "if we were not swimming so hard against the twin tides of agricultural support systems and development demand around our towns and cities".

He contrasted the £850,000 which the Scottish Office provides each year for the Central Scotland Forest with the £25 million available to 1,000 farmers in the area in agricultural subsidies.

A similar point was made in New Scientist in an article by environmental journalist Oliver Tickell. He expressed surprise that more 'wood' is produced in Britain from recycling paper and cardboard than is harvested from all our forests and woodlands, despite the massive investment over the years in forestry. He quoted statistics from 1994 showing that Britain harvested 8.1 million tonnes of trees but recycled 3 million tonnes of wood fibre - equivalent to 11.2 million tonnes of raw wood, allowing for losses in harvesting.

Mr Tickell suggested that to achieve the desired rate of planting, the Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS) is heavily skewed towards new planting. There is thus little reward for looking after existing woods, and, Mr Tickell argued, "without sustained management, a wood will produce little if any decent timber".

Yet, despite this, he wrote, planting is far behind target. He continued: "This is easily understood: farm subsidies amount to some £3 billion a year, 100 times as much as support for forestry. This means that land values are often halved by planting trees, because landowners are cut off from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The solution here is not competing forestry subsidies but the taming of the CAP".

Buzzard Brian Turner

Damage to SSSI's

According to the latest JNCC Annual Report (for 1994-95) a total of 154 SSSIs around Britain, covering 3,054.5 hectares were damaged during the year. This includes 23 Scottish sites reported by SNH. 48 of the GB sites suffered long term damage and 14 partial losses. Agricultural activities were the main cause of damage, responsible for 43% of the sites damaged and 69% of the area involved.

Scottish seals

The Sea Mammal Research Unit, following surveys carried out from 1992-1994, have found that Grey Seal numbers continued to increase, and Common Seals were now recovered from the effects of the 1988 virus epidemic. Of the total estimated population of 108,500 Grey Seals in Britain in 1994, 99,300 were associated with Scottish breeding sites. Grey Seal pup production in Orkney continues to increase by around 7% per year, with new colonies, such as those at Calf of Eday and Copinsay, growing rapidly. However pup production in the Western Isles in 1994 was only 2% higher than in 1993, and that in the Inner Hebrides decreased, so that for the second successive year the increase in total pup production was small. By contrast, the current status of most Common Seal populations were relatively unaffected by the virus.

Studies of seal diets indicate that Sandeels, Cod, Ling and Whiting make up over 80% of the diet of Grey Seals in the North Sea. Seals were estimated to eat approximately 76,000 tonnes of fish in 1992, most in coastal waters. The calculated consumption of Cod by Grey Seals was only around 3% of the commercial catch.

Scoters in the Flows

A survey was conducted last summer by WWT staff and volunteers into breeding Common Scoter in the Flow Country of Caithness and Sutherland. The survey covered 110,000 hectares of bog, including visits to each of the 310 lochs and lochans in the area, yet only 36 pairs of breeding Scoters were recorded on 38 sites, most of which were in the centre of the flows. Although Scoters prefer lochs of high water quality, they were also found in relatively poor quality lochs and were absent from some of the highest quality. The article concluded: "In many ways the survey posed as many questions as it answered, illustrating how little we know about one of the rarer inhabitants of this magical corner of Britain".

Birds of conservation concern

The UK's leading non governmental bird conservation organisations have agreed priorities for bird conservation after reviewing the status of all bird species in the UK, Channel Islands and Isle of Man. This approach follows that developed by the UK Government's Steering Group on Biodiversity. The list is divided into 3 sections: red, amber and green. The red list species are of greatest concern and deserve urgent, effective conservation action. Amber list species are of medium conservation concern, while green list species must, at least, be monitored

Criteria

This list extends and updates previous work using data which have only recently become available. Four publications have been particularly important:

Red Data Birds in Britain, produced by the RSPB and the NCC in 1990, contains a list of British birds of conservation concern.

Birds in Europe, produced by BirdLife International, categorises the conservation status of all European species

Population Trends in British Breeding Birds produced by the BTO documents population trends of common breeding birds since the early 1960s.

The New Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland, produced by the BTO, Irish Wildbird Conservancy and Scottish Ornithologists' Club, documents changes in the range of breeding birds between 1968 and 1991.

Information from the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, from the Wetland Birds Survey , from seabird monitoring and from other survey work has also been used.

Most of the criteria from Red Data Birds in Britain are used, sometimes with modifications, and a few new criteria have been added. Species are included if they are native to the UK, Channel Islands and the Isle of Man and if they pass the thresholds for at least one of the following criteria:

Declining breeding species whose breeding population declined, or range contracted, by 50% or more (rapid) or 25-49% (moderate) over the preceding 25 year period. The moderate decline category is an early warning sign of species which might progress to rapid decline unless action is taken.

Historically declining breeding species - population trends of all breeding species during 1800-1995 were ranked by quantifying 2 reviews of the status of British and Irish birds published earlier this century. Species whose populations had declined most since 1800 were included on the list under this criterion. Six of these are birds of prey, probably because of persecution by humans.

Rare breeding species - with an average of 0.2-300 pairs breeding annually, calculated over the previous 5 years. Very occasional breeders are excluded while colonising species are included.

Localised species - for which 50% or more of their breeding or non breeding population is found at 10 or fewer sites. This criterion is one of the most difficult to adopt in practice because the definition of where one site ends and another begins is not always clear. WeBS site boundaries were used for non-breeding waterfowl and those outlined in Important Bird Areas in the UK, Channel Islands and Isle of Man for all other species.

International importance - breeding species for which 20% or more of the European population breeds in the UK. Non breeding wildfowl for which 20% or more of the north west European population occurs in the UK, and non breeding waders for which 20% or more of the East Atlantic Flyway population occurs in the UK. Ideally the geographic area would be all Europe for both breeding and non breeding seasons; unfortunately non breeding populations for all Europe are poorly known.

Global and European conservation status. This helps put the UK list into an international context. Birds in Europe reviewed the status of European birds. Those species which are either globally threatened with extinction or are listed in Birds in Europe as being of unfavourable

Osprey

Derek Robertson

status in Europe as a whole are included here. Three globally threatened species occur in the UK, the Scottish Crossbill, Aquatic Warbler and Corncrake.

Red list species

Bittern	Nightjar
Common Scoter	Wryneck
Red Kite	Woodlark
White-tailed Eagle	Skylark
Marsh Harrier	Song Thrush
Hen Harrier	Aquatic Warbler
Osprey	Marsh Warbler
Merlin	Dartford Warbler
Black Grouse	Spotted Flycatcher
Capercaillie	Red-backed Shrike
Grey Partridge	Tree Sparrow
Quail	Linnet
Corncrake	Twite
Stone Curlew	Scottish Crossbill
Black-tailed Godwit	Bullfinch
Red-necked Phalarope	Cirl Bunting
Roseate Tern	Reed Bunting
Turtle Dove	Corn Bunting

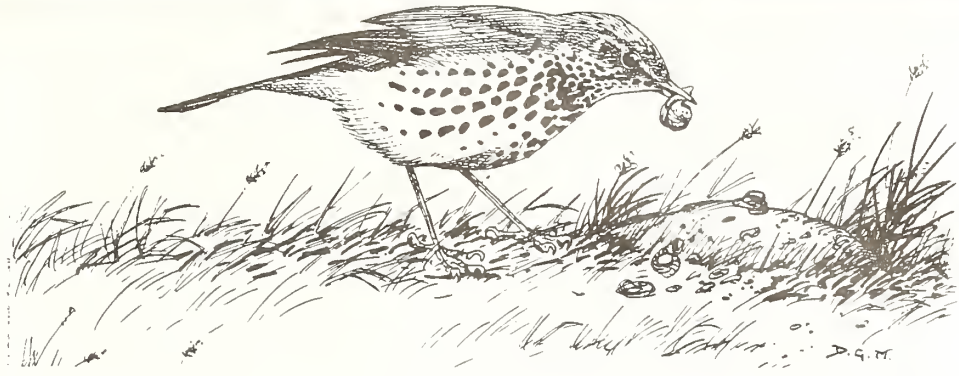
Assigning priorities: red, amber and green

Red list species are those who population or range is rapidly declining, recently or historically, and those of global conservation concern. The red list numbers 36 species. Amber list species are those who population is in moderate decline, rare breeders, internationally important and localised species, and those of an unfavourable conservation status in Europe. This list numbers 110 species. All other species recorded in the UK, Channel Islands and Isle of Man, some 134 of a total of 280 regularly occurring species, are on the green list.

Conservation implications

Lists such as this, based on the best scientific evidence available, must be used to help direct limited resources to those species, habitats, sites and policies where conservation can be achieved. Red Data Birds in Britain helped focus attention on declining species such as the Corncrake, Stone Curlew and Bittern. Recent conservation action means the future of these species appears a little more secure, but they remain priorities for future action as their status is still of grave concern.

The review confirms the international importance of many species in the UK, Channel Islands and Isle of Man, particularly wildfowl, wading birds and seabirds. For example, the UK, Channel Island and Isle of Man hold more than half the world populations of several species - the Scottish Crossbill, Gannet, Great Skua and Pink-footed Goose.



Song Thrush

David Mitchell

Several common, but rapidly declining farmland birds have been added to the red list: Turtle Dove, Skylark, Song Thrush, Spotted Flycatcher, Tree Sparrow, Linnet, Bullfinch, Reed Bunting and Corn Bunting. Some of these species are also declining across Europe. Many other species are listed under the moderate decline criterion on the amber list, including familiar species such as the Swallow, Blackbird and Starling. To understand, halt and then reverse these widespread declines of common species is one of the biggest challenges in bird conservation today.

Scottish data

Of the 36 species of high concern on the red list those which are exclusive to Scotland or with a large percentage of their populations in Scotland are Common Scoter, White-tailed Eagle, Hen Harrier, Osprey, Merlin, Red-necked Phalarope and Scottish Crossbill.

The estimated proportions of the UK populations of list farmland birds found in Scotland are:

Grey Partridge - 23%
Linnet - 18%
Skylark - 26%
Song Thrush - 26%
Spotted Flycatcher - 29%
Tree Sparrow - 14%

"Birds of Conservation Concern" is the result of a review of the status of all bird species in the UK, Channel Islands and the Isle of Man and is the work of the Royal Society for the protection of Birds, the British Trust for Ornithology, BirdLife International, the Hawk and Owl Trust, the Game Conservancy Trust, The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, The Wildlife Trust and the National Trust. For further information and copies of the report, contact **RSPB, 17 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh.**

Amber List species

Red-throated Diver	Bar-tailed Godwit
Black-throated Diver	Whimbrel
Great Northern Diver	Curlew
Red-necked Grebe	Redshank
Slavonian Grebe	Greenshank
Black-necked Grebe	Wood Sandpiper
Manx Shearwater	Turnstone
Storm Petrel	Great Skua
Leach's Petrel	Mediterranean Gull
Gannet	Little Gull
Shag	Common Gull
Bewick's Swan	Lesser Black-backed Gull
Whooper Swan	Herring Gull
Bean Goose	Sandwich Tern
Pink-footed Goose	Arctic Tern
White-fronted Goose	Little Tern
Greylag Goose	Guillemot
Barnacle Goose	Razorbill
Brent Goose	Black Guillemot
Shelduck	Puffin
Wigeon	Stock Dove
Gadwall	Barn Owl
Teal	Short-eared Owl
Pintail	Kingfisher
Garganey	Green Woodpecker
Shoveler	Sand Martin
Pochard	Swallow
Scaup	Dunnock
Eider	Nightingale
Velvet Scoter	Black Redstart
Goldeneye	Redstart
Honey Buzzard	Stonechat
Montagu's Harrier	Ring Ouzel
Golden Eagle	Blackbird
Kestrel	Fieldfare
Peregrine	Redwing
Water Rail	Cetti's Warbler
Spotted Crake	Grasshopper Warbler
Crane	Savi's Warbler
Oystercatcher	Icterine Warbler
Black-winged Stilt	Firecrest
Avocet	Bearded Tit
Ringed Plover	Marsh Tit
Dotterel	Willow Tit
Golden Plover	Crested Tit
Grey Plover	Golden Oriole
Lapwing	Chough
Knot	Starling
Temminck's Stint	Brambling
Purple Sandpiper	Serin
Dunlin	Goldfinch
Ruff	Parrot Crossbill
Jack Snipe	Scarlet Rosefinch
Snipe	Hawfinch
Woodcock	Snow Bunting

The Scottish Ornithologists' Club 1936-1996

The SOC was 60 years old on 24 March this year. On that date in 1936 a group of enthusiasts met in Edinburgh and decided to form a club to attract birdwatchers from throughout Scotland. George Waterston made the original proposal for such a club, and it was his drive and initiative which led to that first meeting and eventually to the formation of the SOC

Earlier clubs

Two earlier clubs, with members drawn mainly from around Edinburgh, really formed the roots of the SOC. In 1929 George founded the Inverleith Field Club with a small group who had either just left or were about to leave The Edinburgh Academy and George Watson's College. As this turned out to be largely a social gathering a second club was formed in 1933, the Midlothian Ornithological Club, the serious study of birds. The aim of the founders of the SOC was to form a club with a much broader base than the MOC thus drawing in members from all over Scotland. The Club's primary function today remains exactly as declared by the founder President Miss Baxter, "to provide a common meeting ground for all those interested in ornithology in Scotland", whether they be academic professionals or birdwatching amateurs.

First Council

At that meeting on 24 March 1936 the original group of 8 decided to form themselves into a Council. Evelyn Baxter and Leonora Rintoul jointly became the first Presidents of the Club in 1936 and served until 1948. That same year both were elected Honorary Presidents and in 1953 their 2 volume The Birds of Scotland was published. James Bartholomew and William Rennie from Glasgow with Charles Connell and Frank Elder from Edinburgh were the members of the Council. The first Chairman was Arthur Duncan and, of course, George Waterston became the Honorary Secretary, a position he held until 1959. Two founder members of the Club, the Rev J M McWilliam and the Rev E T Vernon, joined the Council in 1939. Later Sir Charles Connell, Dr George Waterston and Sir Arthur Duncan all served as Presidents of the Club, and, later still, all were elected Honorary Presidents, as was the Rev J M McWilliam, whilst William Rennie was elected an Honorary member. George was also Honorary Treasurer until 1939 when another founder member the late Ian Munro took on that office.

Club outing

Derek Robertson

First meeting

The first full meeting of the Club was held in Edinburgh on 14 January 1937 when 64 members from all over Scotland, out of a total of 80 attended. In September 1939 members were informed that meetings would be suspended until further notice and that subscriptions would not be payable until these resumed. However, members who had outstanding subscriptions were requested to forward these without delay to the Treasurer in order that the affairs of the Club could be put in order! In May 1945 the Club's balance was £40! The Club survived those difficult and uncertain war years and when Council met again in May 1945 they decided "to restart the activities of the Club at the earliest possible moment". In 1945 the Rev Edward Vernon and his own private secretary Elsie Macdonald, both having kept the affairs of the Club in order during the war years, were appointed acting Secretary and acting Treasurer until George Waterston and Ian Munro returned in April 1946. Later that same year Archie Bryson, also a founder member, became the next Honorary Treasurer, a position he held until 1958. The first full meeting of the Club to be held after the war was in Edinburgh on 10 January 1946 with an attendance of 90 members.

George and Irene

In 1955 the RSPB made George an offer of half time employment as Scottish representative (later Director, Scotland) and at the same time the SOC agreed to pay him as part time Secretary. When he became the RSPB's full time representative in Scotland in 1959 George was succeeded by his wife Irene who became the Club's first full time Secretary. The considerable increase in secretarial work was brought about by the growth in membership and the opening of the Scottish Centre for Ornithology and Bird Protection on 26 October 1959. Irene continued to serve the Club full time until 1969 when she handed over the secretaryship to the very capable hands of Alastair Peirse-Duncombe. However she continued to work as Deputy Secretary for a further 8 years before finally retiring in August 1977.

Without a Waterston working for the Club it really was the end of an era. From 1936 to 1977, a total of 41 years, (two-thirds of the Club's "life" to this Diamond Jubilee year!), George for 23 years followed by Irene for the next 18 years were the heart of the SOC. Both had an enormous capacity for work, were tremendously hospitable, had a strong sense of humour and the ability to get on with every member of the Club. Their long years of dedication gave the SOC the solid foundation few other clubs can equal.

Today

Today there are SOC Branches throughout Scotland. Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen were the earliest, followed by St Andrews and Dundee: in the 1960s Dumfries, Ayr, Inverness and Stirling all formed new branches whilst Thurso formed a group; the 1970s saw 2 new branches in the far south west, Wigtown and New Galloway; the last to be formed was the Borders 1980; and the second group in Orkney in 1989. Today the Branches are known under their regional names but most continue to meet in the towns named above. Unfortunately Perth, which formed a branch in 1948 closed down in 1956, due to lack of support.

Most importantly the SOC has remained a **Club** and never attempted to become a scientific society. All the activities are gatherings of members and friends (or even friendly members!) sharing an enjoyable and common interest in birdwatching. At an AGM held in North Berwick in the late 1980s Ian Pennie voiced the thoughts of most members present during a discussion on some suggested changes when he said "We are still a **Club**, not a scientific body".

Joan Howie

Scottish birdwatchers conference 9th March 1996

The annual SOC/BTO Spring Day Conference took place on Saturday 9 March at the Craiglockhart campus of Napier University in Edinburgh. Fife members of the SOC thinking of attending immediately faced a dilemma: through either malice or incompetence on the part of the Branch Committee this clashed with a David Bell special outing, and moreover with one that started at a civilised hour! Nevertheless, some half dozen members of the branch opted for the conference and I doubt if any of them regretted their decision. (Sorry, David!) About 125 members from other branches and elsewhere, faced with no such dilemma, also attended!

The official hosts of the Conference were the SOC Lothian Branch and the birds of the Lothians represented a principal theme of many of the presentations, with the approaching 60th anniversary of the SOC as a subsidiary theme. The day began with a setting of the ornithological scene by Peter Gordon who of course knows the Lothian bird scene better than most. Some of the topics were reasonably familiar to some of us (some of the speakers had previously spoken to branches on a similar topic) but others covered new ground (e.g. a talk by David Field from the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland on the role of zoos in bird conservation: did you know that Edinburgh zoo are running a captive breeding programme for the Bald Ibis?) The historical perspective came with a witty retrospective by Frank Hamilton under a suitably ambiguous title (Sixty years and still going strong!) After coffee (served promptly and efficiently, other possible conference venues please note!) the speakers in the late morning session looked at the birds of the Lothians in more details: Tony Seymour (of FWAG) at Farming and Wildlife; Ian Thompson (Warden at Aberlady) at Pink-footed Geese in East Lothian; and Mark Holling (on behalf of the organisers of the SE Scotland breeding bird atlas) at some of the more interesting distribution changes to have emerged from the fieldwork for the Atlas.

The early afternoon slot switched the emphasis to the BTO's input to the conference, with Julianne Evans illustrating the important role of individual counters of waders and wildfowl in providing the BTO with the facts and figures to help conserve Scotland's estuaries, and Rob Fuller outlining recent environmental changes in the uplands and the interactions of sheep, deer and birds. These 2 presentations were separated by Dave Fairlamb (the RSPB warden at Vane Farm) who offered a crash course in "Larn Yersel Geordie" (his term, not mine!), in the course of which he also summarised succinctly the status of seabirds in the Forth, based on the findings of the Forth seabird group. The 4th and final session after tea comprised a review of the current status of the Merlin in the Lammermuirs by Ian Poxton of the Lothian Ringing Group and a party piece of intelligent and witty crystal ball gazing by Ken Shaw (RSPB) on possible changes in Scotland's avifauna over the next 60 years (2056 and all that!)

The lecture theatre was comfortable and well equipped and the catering was excellent. There are undoubted advantages in being able to hold the conference on University premises. All in all, this was a most enjoyable and well organised occasion. Our thanks are due to all speakers and to the members of the Lothian branch, and of course the staff from Regent Terrace, who organised everything so efficiently.

Donald Stewart

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Founder members

At the Council Meeting in Edinburgh on 7 December 1995 it was decided that all 9 surviving Founder Members should be given a scroll and complimentary Life Membership. The scrolls were expertly prepared by Club member Mike Ashley.

Dr John Berry

Club President 1951 -1954
Council Member 1955 - 1960
Elected Honorary Member 1980
Director of Nature Conservancy in Scotland from the creation of that post in 1949 until his retiral in 1967, when he was awarded the CBE for his work with the Conservancy and in other fields.

One of the principal authorities in the country on wild geese, keeping a collection of wildfowl at his home Tayfield, Fife.

Published books on freshwater fish and ornithology and also made many contributions to journals. As long ago as 1939 published the 2 volume The Status and Distribution of Wild Duck in Scotland.

Hon. Mrs Bride Berry

Married Dr John Berry in 1936

They have 2 sons and one daughter
She has the distinction of being our only surviving lady founder member.

A G S Bryson

Honorary Treasurer 1946 - 1958
Council Member 1958 - 1963
Served on the Scottish Birds Records Committee for many years.

Member of the Inverleith Field Club and a leading member of the Midlothian Ornithological Club before becoming a founder member of the SOC.

One of the keenest of those early young birdwatchers who visited the Isle of May in the 1930s and was involved in setting up the Observatory in 1934. George Waterston's first visit to Fair Isle was in 1935 accompanied by Archie. A retired Chartered Accountant who served in the Royal Indian Navy during the 1939-45 war and still lives in Edinburgh. For many years he was Honorary Treasurer of the BOU.

T D Dobson

Retired to the Borders from an Edinburgh timber firm.

Tom was a founder member of the Borders branch and served on the branch committee from 1980 -1983

J H B (Ian) Munro

Honorary Treasurer 1939 - 1946
Council Member 1963 - 1968
Edinburgh Branch Chairman 1968 - 1971

Member of IFC and MOC before becoming a founder member of the SOC. He too was one of the keenest of those early young birdwatchers who were involved with the Isle of May in the 1930s and was Honorary Treasurer to the Observatory for 40 years.

Edinburgh Chartered Accountant who was head of the accounts department of Scotsman Publications. Served in the army during the 1939-45 war.

Ian has contributed many important papers to Scottish Birds on Rookery and Rook Roost surveys which he has organised and on the history of the Isle of May Observatory.

Author of Birds of the Pentland Hills.

Sadly Ian died on 15 March this year. An obituary is in the June issue of Scottish Birds.

G L Sandeman

Member of the IFC and the MOC before becoming a founder member of the SOC. Gerry was brought up in Edinburgh where he still lives.

A cousin of George Waterston and a member of the famous sherry family. Served in the army during the 1939-45 war.

Another of the young birdwatchers who visited the Isle of May in the 1930s and did outstanding work on the administrative side.

A tremendous walker round the Lothian coast and in the Pentland Hills, who contributed many records to Ian Munro's book on those hills. Contributed an article on Tern Colonies in the Forth as well as many Short Notes to Scottish Birds.

P W Sandeman

Member of the IFC and the MOC before becoming a founder member of the SOC

Pat was brought up in Edinburgh, younger brother of Gerry.
Served in the army during the 1939-45 war and has lived in Perthshire for a long number of years.

Convener of the Scottish Rare Birds Protection Committee which the SOC set up in 1950 to liaise with the RSPB. When it successfully persuaded the RSPB to appoint a Scottish representative in 1955 the committee disbanded. A great hill walker and Golden Eagle expert from the early days.

His knowledge "placed him in a small, confidential conclave of ornithologists, including the late Dr Leslie Brown, whose pooled records contributed to the total assay of information on the status of Scottish eagles in the fifties and sixties". He has contributed to Short Notes in Scottish Birds over the years.

Ritchie Seath

Honorary Librarian 1965 - 1983
Served on the Library Committee 1965 - 1986

His extensive knowledge and experience of books on natural history and allied subjects was of great value to the Library Committee The Club is very grateful for the many bound copies of the Ibis which he has donated to the Waterston Library over the past 30 years.

He has reviewed many books for Scottish Birds over the years.

A Donald Watson

Club President 1969 - 1972
Vice President 1966 - 1969
Council Member 1959 - 1964
Elected Honorary Member 1980
Elected Honorary President 1986

Member of the MOC before becoming a founder member of the SOC whilst still a schoolboy in Edinburgh After war service in the army embarked on his career as a wildlife artist and has lived in Kirkcudbrightshire for 45 years.

Author and illustrator of several books including The Hen Harrier, A Bird Artist in Scotland and, his latest in 1994 One Pair of Eyes.

He has contributed important papers to Scottish Birds on Bean Geese, Birds of Galloway, Hen Harriers, etc.

Joan Howie

REVIEWS

Atlas of Bird Migration ed. Jonathan Elphick, 1995. Harper Collins, 180 pp. £16.99 hardback. ISBN 0-00-22-38-4.

Although this large format book with its glossy cover and colourful illustrations gives the impression of being yet another 'coffee-table' volume, nothing could be further from the truth. It is well-written, absorbing, informative, and contains little scientific jargon. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

The contributors are drawn from expert migration specialists from all over the world, including our own Chris Mead and Malcolm Ogilvie, and the contents cover all continents and oceans. The line up of artists is also impressive - well-known names creating some beautiful and accurate illustrations. The first chapter is entitled "Birds on the move', and explains the evolution of migration, migration patterns, timing, flight, altitude, genetics, navigation, routes, weather, and threats. The next five chapters give more detail on north American migrants, Eurasian migrants, migrants from the far north, southern hemisphere migrants and migratory seabirds. Each gives one or two examples from each group of family. Annual life cycles are shown in simple diagrams and computer generated maps depict breeding and wintering areas and migration routes, ably supported by a fascinating text. The final chapter concerns irruptions, and is nicely entitled 'Almost migrations'!

Despite the book's title, less than 100 species are mapped, although many others are mentioned in the text. It is therefore not as comprehensive as one would have wished, although a list at the end catalogues another 500 migrants worldwide, with brief details. The only significant error is a photograph of a Great Shearwater wrongly labelled as a Manx. Typographical errors are few, as are incorrect statements; Blackpoll Warblers use NE Trades, not NW, and the time of the strongest thermal activity is mid afternoon, not mid morning. A few of the maps are a little confusing at first glance, and require careful study.

Minor errors apart, this book is an extremely readable book which I would recommend to the less specialist birdwatcher, and will be particularly useful as a general up to date migration text for young people.

Norman Elkins

Other books received

The Penguins Tony D Williams, 1995, OUP, 295pp, £35 hardback. ISBN 0-19-854667-X

The Hornbills Alan Kemp, 1995, OUP, 302pp, £40 hardback. ISBN 0-19-857729-X

Where to watch birds in:-

Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire & Oxfordshire. 2nd edition 1995, £12.99

Somerset, Avon, Gloucestershire & Wiltshire. 2nd edition 1995, £12.99

East Anglia 3rd edition 1995, £11.99 all Helm publications

Irish Birds David Cabot, 1995, HarperCollins, 224pp, £7.99 softback, ISBN0-00-220023-6

Birdwatching Photoguide Rob Hume, HarperCollins, 240pp, £3.50 softback, ISBN 0-00-470756-7

The Red-winged Blackbird Les Beletsky, 1996, Academic Press, 314pp, hardback, ISBN 0-12-084745-0

Birds of Britain & Ireland Peter Holden, 1996, HarperCollins, 255pp, £6.99 softback, ISBN 0-00-220003-1

Garden Birds of Britain & Europe Detlef Singer, HarperCollins, 155pp, £6.99 softback, ISBN 0-00-220056-2

The Birdwatchers Yearbook & Diary 1996 John Pemberton, Buckingham Press, 320pp, £12.50 softback, ISBN 0-9514965-6-5

The Waterston Library

The Lending Section of the Library has recently been moved from the back to the front basement room, where it can be better seen and consulted. We are greatly indebted to Bob Smith for construction of extra shelving to make this possible.

An updated list of books is being sent to each Branch Secretary for members' information. If you wish to borrow books from it and cannot get to Edinburgh yourself, your Branch Representative on Council may be willing to obtain and return books for you. The normal borrowing period of one month will be extended to the next Council meeting when this arrangement is used.

We would like to extend the service of the Library to members if we can. Please feel free just to come and browse if you wish. If you can only visit Edinburgh outwith normal office hours, and especially if you come from a distance, please phone the Librarian (0131 445 2427) to discuss whether a mutually acceptable visiting time can be arranged. No promises, but worth a try! The further you have to come, the more flexible I will try to be.

Dr John Law

Letters to the editor

Bankend Farm
Drumclog
Strathaven ML10 6QG
March 1996

The Editors
Scottish Bird News

Dear Stan, or Ms Laing

I noted in the SOC News that the increase in Buzzards is linked to reduced persecution.

Due to EEC Regulations slaughter houses will no longer clear fallen stock from the moor. Charges are as high as £15 - £40 per head. The result is, fallen stock are left on the moor for the Buzzard, Fox and Crow. The order are - no more killing Fox, Buzzard, Crow - they have become an economic factor. I estimate on a 2000 head sheep farm they save between £300 and £1000 in disposing of fallen stock. Outside keepered moors Buzzard are set to double this year. I have seen a 300% increase in my area in 1995.

A 2hours flyby in September (Bankend moorland OS64/36)

16 Sept 1700hrs 3 Buzzards)
1715hrs 2 Buzzards) Total 6
1900hrs 1 Buzzard)

Total Buzzards Sept (14)

March 1996 There are 2 females and 1 male in my sector - and enough dead sheep to last them and young throughout the breeding season.

My conclusion
Pure simple economics!

Yours

Gilmour Steven
SOC member

NOTICES

Special holiday offer to SOC members!

To celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the Club, SOC member Jeff Price of Ibis is offering a Weekend-Migration-Break to Falsterbo in southern Sweden in September 1996. Experience the thrill of Scandinavia migration on this 5-day complete package tour to one of Europe's major migration points. Falsterbo ranks alongside the Bosphorus Straits and Gibraltar when it comes to diversity of species and sheer numbers of birds. Jeff Price will meet the group on arrival at Copenhagen Airport (flight from Glasgow) and the 4 nights will be spent in a family run hotel in the small country town of Sjöbo in central Skåne. Skåne enjoys the enviable position as the most bird rich county in Sweden, and the autumn may be the king of all seasons when millions of Scandinavian breeding birds pour through.

The trip will concentrate on the many migratory and staging species which funnel out of southern Sweden over the Falsterbo peninsula. On a typical morning you will study the visible migration of passerines and raptors over the Falsterbo area. You will also have ample opportunity to study the enormous concentrations of waterfowl and shorebirds which gather here prior to their southward flight.

Early afternoons will be spent at Ljungen where birdwatchers gather to witness the many raptors and other soaring species that make good use of the thermals created over this flat stretch of heather and juniper bushes. Late afternoon will be spent searching some of the many inland forests and lakes for woodland species such at Black Woodpecker and possible irruption species such as Honey Buzzard, Common Buzzard, Rough-legged Buzzard, Sparrowhawk and, traditionally, a fair sprinkling of Red-footed Falcon and Hobby. Golden Eagle and White-tailed Eagle are very likely, with other Aquila are rare but regular.

Almost all the region's duck species are present at this time, and there are excellent chances of seeing King Eider and Smew. Phalaropes, Stints, Kentish Plover, Curlew Sandpiper and Broad-billed Sandpiper are among the shorebirds also expected. For further information about this superb offer, contact **Jeff Price, Indelukket 47, 2900 Hellerup, Denmark. Tel. (+45) 39624162.**

Last years SOC quiz Team

Pamela Black

Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Fair

Following the success of last year's event, the RSPB (in association with the National Trust for Scotland, World-Wide Fund for Nature and Scottish Conservation Projects Trust) are again holding a **Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Fair at Vane Farm on Saturday 31 August and Sunday 1 September 1996.** It will be bigger and better than last year with dozens of events, games, children's activities, talks and demonstrations. There will be retail stalls selling crafts, cameras, binoculars, telescopes, clothing and books.

Applications are invited for the 1996 Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Fair photographic competition supported by Kodak and Lizards. The subject is **Scotland's Countryside and Wildlife** and application forms are available from Lizars or the RSPB at the address below. The prizes are vouchers for photgraphic equipment from Lizars and the closing date for entries is **22 July 1996.**

The **SOC** are taking a stand at the Fair and the SOC Quiz Team will be defending the Shield won last year - so come along and give them your support! We will also be selling second hand books, proceeds of which go to the Library Fund. The usual selection of SOC stock will be available plus the new SOC Mug designed by artist and SOC member Derek Robertson. If anyone would like to assist at the stand, please get in touch with 21 Regent Terrace and, of course, we will be delighted to see as many SOC members as possible at what promises to be a great day out.

Further information about the Fair and advance tickets are available from **SWCF Tickets, RSPB, 17 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BN.**

Raptor Conference

The 2nd International Conference on Raptors is due to be held at the University of Urbino, Urbino, Italy between 2-5 October 1996. It will cover all aspects of the study and conservation of birds of prey throughout the world. **For further details please contact Thomas E Krueger, Via Eulambio 14A, 34072 Gradisca d'Isonzo, GO, Italy or Dr Patricia L Kennedy, Colorado State University, Dept of Fish and Wildlife Biology, Colorado Springs, CO. USA.**

Please also note that the deadline for abstracts is 1 August 1996 and details for these can be obtained from the Conference Committee Chairperson **Massimo Pandolfi, Istituto di Scienze Morfologiche, Via Oddi 21, 61029 Urbino, Italy.**

The Arisaig Hotel

Family run hotel on Arisaig Bay looking over the island of Eigg. Arisaig provides access to both moorland and coastline offering a great variety of habitats to naturalists. There are boat trips from the harbour opposite the hotel out to the Small Isles - Eigg, Muck and Rum with frequent sightings of whales and dolphins. Accessible by train Arisaig is an ideal location for a holiday that combines seashore, mountains and boat trips.

For more information contact Mr & Mrs Ross, Arisaig Hotel, Arisaig, Inverness-shire PH39 4NH. Tel 01687 450210 Fax 01687 450310

SEPA

SEPA was established by the Environment Act 1995 and is responsible to the Secretary of State for Scotland. It formally came into being on 12 October 1995, and became fully operational on 1 April 1996 with its staff of around 600 and a budget of £28m. It was formed from an amalgamation of Scotland's 7 River Purification Boards, the River Purification Authority functions undertaken by the 3 Islands Councils, HM Industrial Pollution Inspectorate, the waste regulation and local air pollution functions of the District and Islands Councils and many of the duties of the Hazardous Waste Inspectorate. It has offices throughout Scotland, and its Head Office at Stirling. The idea of the unitary authority covering environmental protection and pollution control is a good one. Doubts over just how effective SEPA will be in practice centre on its remit, resources and pressure from Government to be sympathetic to industry and development. SEPA can be contacted at **Erskine Court, The Castle Business Park, Stirling FK9 4TR. Tel 01786 457700, fax 01786 446885.**

Slides of birds - original colour slides for lectures
SAE for current list and prices to:-
Vanellus Presentation, 44 Southgrove Road, Sheffield S10 2NQ Tel 0114 2664362

Rarity descriptions

It is very helpful if all observers of rarities send in their descriptions (preferably to the relevant county or regional recorder) as soon as possible after the sighting. It will speed up the decision making process if notes on all major spring rarities are submitted by mid July at the latest. Please do not wait until the end of the year. Thank you. **M J Rogers, Secretary BBRC, 2 Churchtown Cottages, Towednack, St. Ives, Cornwall TR25 3AZ.**

Scottish Ringers Conference 1996

The 1996 Scottish Ringers Conference will take place in the Fife Arms Hotel, Braemar over the weekend 15-17 November hosted by Highland Ringing Group. Full details will be sent to all ringers in due course. Anyone else requiring information about this conference should contact **Bill Taylor, 22 Forbes Hill, Forres, Morayshire IV36 0JL (enclosing an SAE) or phone 01309 673099 (home) or 01309 672271 (work)**

British Ornithologists' Union

The next meeting of the BOU Records Committee will be held at Cley on Saturday 13 July 1996. The afternoon session will be open to the public. It will take place in Cley Village Hall from 2 p.m. until 4 p.m.

Topics for the Agenda of the open session will include:

A Categorisation
B Assessment of potential escapes
C Old records
D Taxonomic changes and the British & Irish list
E Question Time

We hope that this will give birders an opportunity to see and hear something of the work of this Committee of the BOU, and provide a forum for discussion. Obviously, attendance will be influenced to some extent by the presence of rare birds in other parts of the country! However, in order to get some idea of likely numbers, it would be extremely useful if people considering attending could send a postcard to **Tony Marry, Two Hoots, Old Hall Farm Barns, Cley next the Sea, Norfolk NR25 7RY**. This will allow tea and coffee numbers to be determined, and sufficient documentation to be prepared.

Cormorant David Mitchell

Sea Eagle Yacht Charters Ltd are advertising their luxury 43foot skippered yacht as a premier support vessel for photographic and adventure expeditioning in wilderness areas, wildlife film making, scientific research and surveys, and wildlife observation. 'Sea Eagle' has an impressive and varied sailing history - from the Tropics to the Arctic, the East Coast of America to the West Coast of Scotland and is available for charter anywhere in the world. For further details please contact **Angus Robertson, 12 Wellington Place, Leith, Edinburgh EH6 7EQ. Tel. 0131 554 3630.**

Seabirds in the marine environment

A Symposium jointly sponsored by UK Joint Nature Conservation Committee and the Seabird Group will take place at the University of Glasgow over the weekend 22-24 November 1996.

Anybody wishing further information should contact **Dr J B Reid, "Seabirds in the Marine Environment" Joint Nature Conservation Committee, 17 Rubislaw Terrace, Aberdeen AB1 1XE as soon as possible. Tel No 01224 642863**

Glasgow University Expedition - Seychelles 1996

Many birders have visited the Seychelles in recent years and may have casual sightings of the endemic Seychelles White-eye Zosterops modestus. We would like to hear from anyone who has seen Z modestus on Mahe, especially during the 90s. Site, dates, number of birds and activity would be most useful. This information will help us plan our fieldwork and may reveal new sites. All help will be acknowledged and you will be sent a summary of the results of the fieldwork in late 1996. Please send any information to Allan Mee.

During 1996, zoologists from Glasgow University will be carrying out ecological research and survey work in the Seychelles. Two major projects are planned on the status and ecology of the globally threatened Seychelles White-eye Zosterops modestus, and the endemic Seychelles Fruit Bat Pteropus seychellensis The aim of the White-eye project is to determine its population size, distribution, habitat requirements as well as threats to the species. The expedition will be based on Mahe, Seychelles, and will last approximately 3 months. Project work will be carried out in close cooperation with the Seychelles Division of the Environment and representatives of BirdLife International. The total cost of the Expedition will be about £15,000.

SOC members can help us raise funds by purchasing expedition T-shirts. These will feature a White-eye design painted by bird artist Dave Pullan and cost £10 each. We will also keep contributors informed on work in the Seychelles and send a copy of the project report once we return to Scotland. For further details and tee-shirts please contact : **Allan Mee, c/o Dr Will Cresswell, Dept. of Environmental & Evolutionary Biology, IBLS, Graham Kerr Building, Glasgow University G12 8QQ. Tel 0141 339 8855 Ext. 5151**

MEMBERS' REQUESTS

Colour marked Oystercatchers

Sightings of yellow dye marked Oystercatchers, especially their breeding locations will be greatly appreciated by **Pat French, Grianan, Strone Road, Newtonmore, Inverness-shire PH20 1BA Tel. 01540 673719**

Colour marked Greylag Geese

Sightings of Greylags bearing dye marks, darvic rings or neck collars, together with details of colours and letters seen (no matter how incomplete), should be sent to: **Brian Etheridge, "Morven", Station Road, Avoch, Ross-shire, IV9 8RW. Telephone 01381 620098 (home) or 01463 715000 (work).**

Colour ringed Ring Ouzels

A number of birds have been individually colour ringed. Any sightings of colour ringed Ring Ouzels will be greatly appreciated by **David Arthur, 12 Dundee Street, Carnoustie, Angus DD7 7PD. 01241 853356.**

Colour ringed Stonechats

All sightings will be acknowledged by **Andrew Thorpe, 30 Monearn Gardens, Milltimber, Aberdeen AB1 1YP**

Colour ringed Mute Swans - Lothian & Fife

Sightings should be sent to **Allan & Lyndesay Brown, 61 Watt's Gardens, Cupar, Fife, KY15 4UG (Telephone 01334 656804)** from whom further information can be obtained on the study.

Wing tagged Hen Harriers

Details of any sightings however incomplete should be sent to **Brian Etheridge, RSPB North Scotland Office, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW tel 01463 715000** as soon as possible.

Wing tagged Red Kites and Sea Eagles

see SBN 40: pages 3 & 14

Thanks to

Thanks are once again due to the army of volunteers who willingly come into 21 every quarter and stuff envelopes. The stuffers for the March mailing were: Rosemary Davidson, Bob & Betty Smith, Ethel Russell and last, but not least, Joan Wilcox.

SOC NOTICES

200 Club

Winners in the first quarter of 1996 were:
January - 1st £30 D Clugston, Barrhead; 2nd £20 Miss S D J Stuart, Edinburgh; 3rd £10 I T Craig, Falkirk
February - 1st £30 J M Wills, Inverurie; 2nd £25 Miss J E Howie, St Johns Town of Dalry; 3rd £20 D R Stewart, St Andrews; 4th £10 R Warhurst, Manchester
March - 1st £50 N Elkins, Cupar; 2nd £30 L H Campbell, Cambridgeshire; 3rd £20 - J Lamb, Newmills, Fife; 4th £10 W McKechnie, Cumnock

A warm "thank you" to all members who rejoined at the start of the Club's 'year' on 1st June. Any SOC member over 18 is very welcome to join; just send me a cheque for £12 payable to "SOC 200 Club" and you will be entered for the next draw. **Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL (01896 822176)**

SOC Branch Members' nights

16 Sept - Borders, Clyde, Grampian & Highland
17 Sept - Lothian & West Galloway
18 Sept - Ayrsire, Caithness,Dumfries & Fife
19 Sept - Orkney, Stirling & Tayside
Stewartry branch are having a buffet in the Ken Bridge Hotel on **19 Sept** to celebrate the Club's 60th and the Branches 20th anniversaries. Please contact Joan Howie for further details.

Discussion Group

All members are welcome to attend, whether you live locally or come from afar. Meetings start at 7.30pm at 21 Regent Terrace, and are normally on the first Wednesday of the month apart from the summer. The dates for the rest of the year are: 10 April (note this is not the first Wednesday), 4 September, 2 October, 6 November and 4 December. The first meeting of 1997 will be on 8 January 1997.

Cape Clear

The Lothian Branch is organising a trip to Cape Clear Island which lies off the Cork coast of SW Ireland between 7-14 September 1996, taking 10-12 people. Cape Clear is internationally famous for its large seabird movements and vagrants are frequently recorded in the autumn. There are still places available so if anyone is interested please contact **Ian Thomson on 01875 870588.**

Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club. It is published 4 times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices need to be sent to the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace no later than 5 weeks before publication. The magazine acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and to disseminate information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. The views expressed in articles in Scottish Bird News are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication. The SOC also publishes the journal Scottish Birds which publishes original papers and notes on Scottish Ornithology and the Scottish Bird Report. For details of these publications and membership contact the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

Endowment Fund Grants awarded for 1996

A total of £1425 was awarded from the Endowment Fund for the following projects - Grants continuing from previous years:-
A Thorpe - £50 - Stonechat work
B Taylor - £50 - Crested Tit work
Lothian Ringing Group - £100 Seabird work
A Ramsay - £200 - Shearwater work

New grants for 1996
A & L Brown - £250 - Mute Swans
A Ramsay - £50 - Hirundines
H Inslay - £200 - Common Gulls
Highland Ringing Group - £150 - Wildfowl
P French - £150 - Lapwings
EJ & SJ Williams - £75 - Red-throated Divers
R Morton - £150 - Seabirds

If you would like to apply for a grant from the SOC to assist with any worthwile project of study for 1997 please ask for an application form from SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT. 0131 556 6042

1996 Annual Conference

The dates still to be finalised for the 1996 Annual Conference are 1st/3rd November 1996, at the Duke of Gordon Hotel, Kingussie.

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THE SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Scottish Bird News

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Edited by Stan da Prato
Assisted by Pamela Black, Sylvia Laing and Joan Wilcox

The 1996 breeding season in Scotland

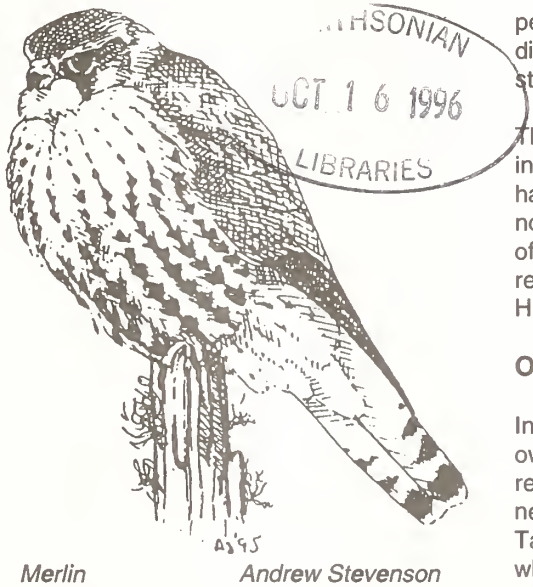
Once again we present our round up of the breeding season that has just passed. As always we stress that it is based on fieldworkers' first opinions and tends to highlight the more obvious events and changes. Readers should remember that the article is put together in early July when not all relevant information is available. This was particularly true in 1996 which seems to have been a very late season for a great variety of birds

The weather

Everyone commented on this! Given our national fixation with weather and its vagaries this is hardly surprising but there have been remarkable extremes recorded in the last few months. Many people report low numbers of breeding birds, especially small passerines, which seem to have been hit by the very cold spell during the winter. Some non passerines were also affected mainly by difficulties in getting into breeding condition.

With sea temperatures below average after the cold winter, a high frequency of easterly winds gave abnormally low temperatures in March and May in eastern regions.

After a warm start, March was colder and wetter than average in the east, where it was one of the dullest on record. Considerable snow fell in mid month, especially on eastern hills. The west was sunnier and relatively dry. April was relatively mild, but very wet except in the north east. After a fine but cold start, it became very wet in mid month in the west with snow on Border hills. Changeable but milder weather in the second half of April gave way to wintry showers at the end of the month. May was one of the coldest on record, but relatively dry. North to east winds in the first 3 weeks gave showers which fell as snow over high ground in the east, although the west was sunnier and drier. Milder, unsettled weather ended the month. June redressed the balance, although the north and west had a cool, wet and windy start. Drier warm and sunny weather set in generally from the 12th, although cooler duller episodes occurred in the north and northeast, and it became unsettled everywhere during the last week. July saw a lot of cool damp weather as systems pushed in from the west.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Merlin *Andrew Stevenson*
One of the winners of the awards for artwork in Local Bird Reports (see back page)

Raptors

It was the poorest season recorded in a 13 year study of Merlins in SE Scotland. Merlins also did badly in other parts of the Borders. Merlin numbers said to be down in parts of NE Scotland though breeding success there seems to have been higher than in the south east.

Peregrines also did poorly in the Trossachs, Ross and SE Scotland but better in pars of Perthshire and Angus where 16 monitored pairs fledged 44 young. Some birds seemed not to come into proper condition for breeding. Peregrines had mixed success in the north east with coastal pairs doing better than those inland.

Buzzards continued to spread wherever gamekeepers allow them to. Keepers are much less likely to tolerate Hen Harriers and again there were reports of illegal persecution of this species. Hen Harriers did not do particularly well in their Orkney stronghold

The few reports of Golden Eagles to hand indicate rather mixed fortunes. Ospreys had an average season in Tayside but did not do particularly well in some other parts of the Highlands. There were intriguing reports of summering birds outwith the Highlands.

Owls

In general 1996 was not a good year for owls. However some fieldworkers report reasonable success by Tawny Owls nesting in boxes. Other people found their Tawny Owls doing badly. Barn Owls, whose Scottish stronghold is now in the south west, suffered badly during the winter. In Galloway Forest Park breeding numbers were reduced by about two thirds and the survivors nested very late. Short-eared Owls seem to have been scarce in most areas.

Gamebirds

We receive relatively few comments on these. Partridges continue in high numbers in Easter Ross. Red Grouse were approximately a month behind schedule in SE Scotland but seem to have bred well. Further north, breeding success seems to have been quite good. Black Grouse continue to decline in many areas.

Waterfowl

Black-throated Divers again did well in parts of NW Scotland. However numbers of Slavonian Grebes north of the Great Glen dropped to 11 pairs - the lowest number since 1969. Black-necked Grebes were down at the Loch of Kinnordy.

Mute Swans survived the winter well, at least in SE Scotland. Here the well studied population continues to move into new nesting sites. However, there were many reports of ducks having poor success. In parts of the Firth of Forth Eiders reared few young, often due to Crow predation. At Forvie Eider numbers were reduced despite Fox control.

Seabirds

Seabirds were very late in starting to breed making it hard for fieldworkers to provide information on breeding success by early July. On some of the islands in the Firth of Forth Kittiwakes were down by about 20% and Shags down by 10%. It looks as though those Kittiwakes that did breed have not had a very productive season. However Kittiewakes were in record numbers on Canna. Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls increased on the Isle of May. Terns were again scarce or absent on traditional sites on the East Lothian coast. Terns did poorly in Cromarty and in Orkney.

Ringers, who visit seabird colonies later than census workers, report that at least some seabirds may have done better than at first thought. Breeding success of Puffins, Shags and Cormorants seems to have been quite good in the Firth of Forth. Shags and Cormorants also bred well in Cromarty.

Inland, some colonies of Common and Black-headed Gulls were well down in several parts of the country.

Waders

In general 1996 was not a good season for waders. Many are already at a relatively low ebb notably Lapwing, Snipe and Redshank in the more intensively farmed regions. Oystercatchers have not been declining but many lost clutches due to flooding.

In the uplands Golden Plover were said to be scarce on the Border hills. Even higher up Dotterel had problems with the late spring on their traditional stronghold in the Cairngorms.

Once again a number of people commented on low numbers of Common Sandpipers although this problem seems to be largely confined to southern Scotland.

Near Passerines

Green Woodpecker also seem to have suffered during the winter in a number of areas. Nightjar, however, are holding their own in Galloway. This pattern of residents suffering more than migrants over the winter seems to have been one of the features of this past season. Swifts were very late to arrive in many parts of the country.

Passerines

Again the pattern was one of a late season with reduced numbers of many residents, especially cold sensitive species such as Wrens. However, there was considerable variation according to geography with upland and inland populations most vulnerable to the cold. Breeding success may have been quite good for some birds especially insectivorous migrants, though most were later than average and observers on the Isle of May noted migrants arriving in very poor condition.

Several people reported declines in both Grey and Pied Wagtails. Unfortunately no one seems to study Meadow Pipits which are probably our commonest breeding bird!

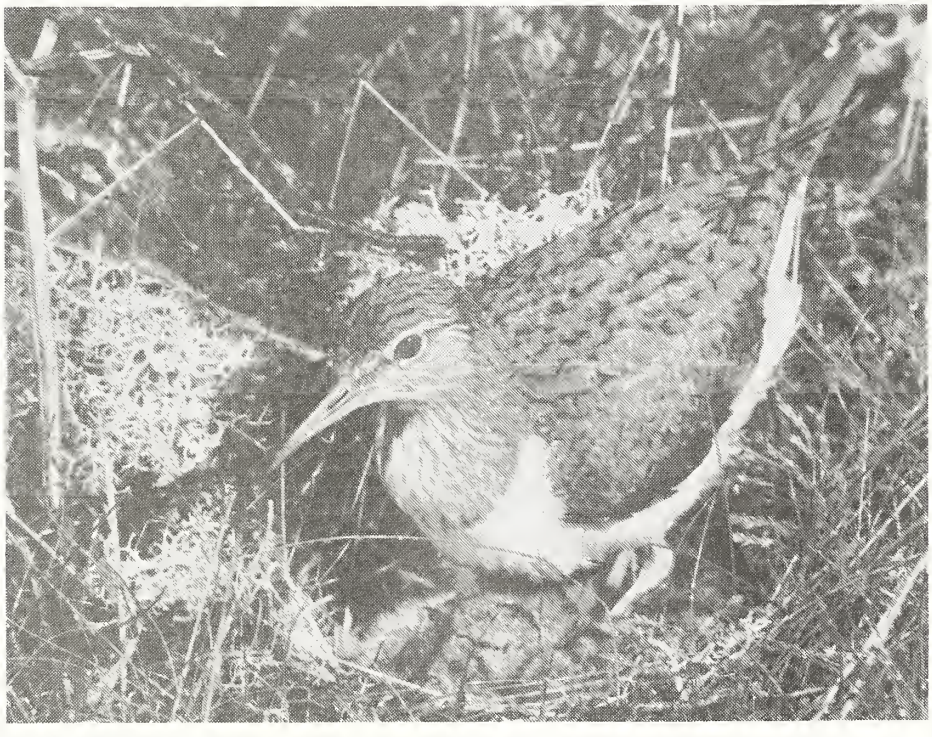
Dipper had some problems from flooding but seem to have come through the winter rather better than many other residents; their unique feeding method allows Dippers to obtain food when much of the ground and still water is frozen.

Of the thrush family Song Thrushes showed small increases in some regions although nationally the species is of great concern, probably due to the effect of molluscicides. Blackbirds reared many young in some gardens despite the dry spell in May; supplementary feeding is probably important for garden Blackbirds. Ring Ouzels were reported well down in much of southern Scotland but in average numbers in the north east.

Redstarts were down a little in the Trossachs. Pied Flycatchers, which readily take to nest boxes, were up in the Trossachs and Galloway though breeding success was slightly down in one study. The drop in tit numbers may have helped the flycatchers in Galloway where more boxes became available. Tits seem to have had a difficult winter, sometimes followed by low breeding success, though numbers varied greatly between areas. Spotted Flycatchers remain at a low ebb.

Whinchats seem to have been down in several places. Stonechats, which are still at a low ebb in many inland and eastern sites following earlier hard winters, have now been hit along the west coast.

Warblers were generally reported in good numbers. Willow Warblers in Scotland still show no sign of the reduction reported in southern England. Blackcap, Garden Warbler and Whitethroat were all said to be fairly numerous in many parts of the country. This may not be true of Sedge and Grasshopper Warbler, though we received very few comments on either of these. Many Wood Warblers sang in appropriate habitat though at least one observer thought that they were breeding either badly or very late. Lesser Whitethroats seem to have become scarcer again.



Common Sandpiper *Edmund Fellowes*

Blue Tits at nest box *Mike Ashley*

Hirundines were said to be up or holding their own in many areas. There were several comments about good numbers of Sand Martins. House Martins and Swallows presented a mixed picture.

Of the seed eaters there have been some local increases, or at least halts in decline, probably due to some land use changes, eg set aside, providing more food. Even so, many species are still well below what they used to be. One that is now very scarce in many places is the Redpoll though that species is less likely to be affected by farming and numbers were up in parts of the Highlands. Tree Sparrows held their own in some colonies but are now a relatively scarce bird. Crossbills were scarce last winter, due to a poor cone crop, but are now appearing in numbers as cone production picks up.

Ravens may have done better than many other species in the uplands: hard winters do help some species.

Acknowledgments

Thanks are again due to the following people without whose help this report would not be possible.

Bill Brackenridge, Keith Brockie, Allan W Brown, Brian Cosnette, Andrew Dowell, R C Dickson, Keith Duncan, Norman Elkins, Dave Fairlamb, Ian Francis, Peter Gordon, Sandra Hacker, Nigel Harding, Mike Harris, Malcolm Harvey, Mark Holling, Alex Joss, Donnie Macdonald, Eric Meek, Ray Murray, Brian Neath, Russell Nisbet, Ian Poxton, Gordon Riddle, Henry Robb, Malcolm Ross, Chris Rollie, Geoff Shaw, Bob Smith, Patrick Stirling-Aird, Bob Swann & Sarah Wanless.

Apologies to any fieldworkers whose forms came in too late for us to include them in our summary. Anyone wishing to join in for 1997 is most welcome. Please let Sylvia Laing know of your interest.

Charles Frank

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The 1996 Moray Firth beach bird surveys

A spell of severe arctic weather brought a very cold end to 1995. In the Moray Firth the inner parts of the firths and the heads of the bays were covered in ice and many waders lost access to their feeding grounds. The snow covered, frozen ground also meant that feeding in fields was impossible. This put many wader species under threat. Although the thaw started on Hogmanay, the ice did not really clear for another week. Shortly after this we were subject to an unusually high preponderance of cold and, at times, very strong easterly winds. This appeared to create problems for a variety of seabirds

Auk movements

First evidence that something unusual was happening came on 8 January, 1996 when, following a weekend of strong north east winds, there was a large movement of Little Auks into the Moray Firth. Over 6,000 were counted off Brora by Alan Vittery. Birds were recorded inland at a wide variety of sites and Tony Mainwood found 23 dead ones, along with many other auks and waders, on the beaches south of Golspie.

On the 14 January, Brian Etheridge reported 44 dead Guillemots and 18 dead waders on the beach at Chanonry so we decided to check the east Ross beaches between Shandwick and Tarbet Ness. These beaches, along with those between Dornoch and Golspie in Sutherland were regularly checked for dead birds for the next 3 months. Details of our findings are given in Tables 1 and 2.

Waders

Most of the waders found dead were located in the first fortnight, following the cold spell. Oystercatchers, Curlew and Woodcock predominated. These all rely, to a certain extent, on feeding in fields and this habitat would have been denied to them during the cold spell. Few smaller estuarine waders were found but these are likely to have been quickly scavenged by crows and gulls, as there was evidence (Insley & Swann 1996 *BTO News*:204) that large numbers of juvenile Redshank also perished at this time. Only a few dead ducks were located but a surprising number of Greylag Geese.

As Table 2 shows the number of seabirds affected varied with time. The number of Little Auks was highest following the early January influx and then slowly declined. Guillemot and Razorbill numbers rose steadily to peak in mid February, declined and then rose again during another spell of strong easterlies in late March and early April. Fulmar and Gulls showed high mortality rates in mid January and then declined. Very few Divers, Shags, Cormorant or Gannets were found dead.

Table 1 ***Total number of birds found dead on East Ross and SE Sutherland beaches January-March 1996***

Auks		**Waders**	
Guillemot	1775	Oystercatcher	32
Razorbill	350	Curlew	12
Little Auk	157	Woodcock	10
Puffin	16	Redshank	1
		Lapwing	1
Others			
		Wildfowl	
Fulmar	32		
Shag	9	Wigeon	1
Cormorant	5	Goldeneye	1
Gannet	2	Eider	1
Heron	1	Common Scoter	4
Red-throated Diver	5	Velvet Scoter	1
		Long-tailed Duck	3
		Shelduck	1
		Greylag Goose	19
Gulls			
Kittiwake	73		
Herring Gull	36		
Common Gull	34		
Great Black-backed Gull	8		

Table 2 ***Number of birds per km according to date on E Ross/ Sutherland beaches***

	7/1-20/1	21/1-3/2	4/2-17/2	18/2-2/3	3/3-17/3	18/3-31/3	1/4-14/4
km walked	28.7	26.4	18.5	27.2	9.0	10.5	13.0
Guillemot	8.2	16.2	25.9	5.1	9.0	23.5	25.0
Razorbill	0.6	3.2	5.1	0.7	1.4	7.0	3.7
Little Auk	2.9	1.6	0.9	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.4
Fulmar	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.0	0.3	0.1
Kittiwake	1.7	0.5	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.3
waders	1.4	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1
ducks	0.3	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0
Greylag Goose	0.5	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Wider survey

During an RSPB survey from 23-26 February records were received from other parts of the Moray Firth (Table 3) showing that the wreck was not confined to the east Ross or Sutherland coast, with significant numbers of birds being recorded on the Morayshire coast and the Inverness Firths. This was despite the fact that exceptionally high tides the previous week had scoured many beaches clean of corpses.

Table 3 ***RSPB Moray Firth Counts 23-26 February***

	Moray	Inverness Firth
Km walked	18	14
Guillemot	29	90
Razorbill	3	14
Little Auk	1	
Puffin	1	
Cormorant		1

Only 4 Guillemots, 3 Razorbills and 1 Fulmar were reported as being oiled, making this yet another non oiling seabird mortality incident. It is the fifth major one to be recorded in the Moray Firth since 1983, the last being in 1994 (Swann 1995, *SBN*:34).

These wrecks appear to be predominantly weather related, being triggered by prolonged spells of easterly winds in late winter. As with previous wrecks, mainly immature birds were involved and Guillemots, as usual predominated.

Contributory factors

Several factors, however, made this wreck slightly unusual. Firstly its prolonged nature as it lasted for approximately 11 weeks. In Easter Ross and south east Sutherland 133.5 kms of beach were walked and 1,775 dead Guillemots located, giving an average of 13.3 corpses per km. This is higher than that recorded in the 1983-86 wrecks, but lower than the 23.1 per km recorded during the 1994 wreck in Easter Ross. However, because of the more prolonged nature of the 1996 wreck, far more Guillemots were actually found dead than the 673 found during the 1994 wreck.

Secondly, the species composition differed markedly from 1994. During that wreck Guillemots made up 94% of the auk corpses, Razorbills only 6% and only 1 Little Auk was found. In 1996, however, Razorbills made up 15% of all auk corpses and Little Auks 7%. This was the largest wreck of Little Auks in the Moray Firth since at least the mid 1970s. The 1994 wreck was also characterised by a huge mortality of Shags, most of which had originated in south east Scotland and north east England. This did not occur in 1996 despite an even more prolonged spell of easterly winds than those that triggered the 1994 Shag wreck. Finally, the large number of dead waders on the shore (and possibly also Greylag Geese) was almost certainly a result of the December 1995 freeze up.

Effects on breeding colonies

Wrecks such as this one are almost certainly natural, weather related, features. They are, however, worth recording as any increase in their frequency could lead to changes in recruitment at seabird colonies. Obviously, if the birds involved are of local origin that could have some effect on local colonies. Of 10 ringed Guillemots found, 7 were in fact from local colonies, one from Canna on the west of Scotland, one from the Isle of May and we await details of the other one.

We would like to thank everyone who took part in these counts and particularly Tony Mainwood, Rachel Plant, Andrew Ramsay and Dora Swann who helped with repeat counts of the beaches.

Bob Swann and David Butterfield

Guillemots at a breeding colony *Bobby Tulloch*

Birds washed up in Grampian early in 1996

As it seemed likely that the intermittent severe weather during the 1995-96 winter would lead to further seabird mortality I made regular visits to east Grampian beaches. A certain number of birds came ashore in February, but most did not arrived until the easterly gales in March, after the annual RSPB survey. They included some live individuals until 18 March, but, by this time, most of the bodies were decomposing, and many were either broken up in the surf or buried in kelp torn up the rough seas and blown sand, so that the number recorded was probably very incomplete. The results are compared with some previous surveys in the table.

It can be seen that the main mortality was of auks, especially Guillemots, for which it probably equalled the worst previously recorded due to oil pollution early in 1970 (when it was worse further south), though I once saw a similar density of bodies due to oil pollution about 1960. There was the usual proportion of large, heavily marked northern birds, but an unusually high proportion of adults in all species where there were enough to assess it, possibly because the young birds had gone south? There was also a large Razorbill, with a wing measuring 218mm, which presumably belonged to the northern and eastern nominate race *Alca t. torda*.

The most unusual species were a Whooper Swan and grey geese, including a Greylag, a Whitefront and a 'Russian' Bean Goose (to be discussed elsewhere), a Woodcock and 2 Starlings, which presumably died during weather related movements.

W R P Bourne

Seabird wrecks on the east coast of the Grampian region

	1970		1990	1994	1996	
	1 Jan-15 Feb	28 Feb 1 March	15 April-15 May	20 Jan-27 April	11-24 Feb	17-24 March
Kilometres	(75?)	(75?)	23	10	7	7
divers	3		1			
Fulmar	6		1	4	2	3
Gannet	6				1	
Cormorant	8					
Shag	1		4	8	1	8
swan sp					1	1
grey geese	6				3	
scoter	3					
Eider	36		1	2	2	1
Woodcock						1
Great Black-backed Gull	5	6	1			
Herring Gull	5		11	10	3	5
Common Gull	3			4	1	1
Black-headed Gull	4		2	1	1	
Kittiwake	6		8	10	1	2
Little Auk	437	1			1	1
Razorbill	89		49	5	8	
Guillemot	157		158	76	46	153
Puffin	71		2	1	1	9
Starling						2
Others & unidentified	283	380		2		
Total	1129	+380	244	124	73	133
Birds/km	(15?)	(+5?)	10.6	12.4	7.3	19

(Figures for 1970 from Scottish Birds 6:235-250, when most accessible parts of the coast were probably covered, and for 1990 and 1994 from Scottish Bird News 19:3 and 35:2).

Deep diving Guillemot

Oilmen working from the *Ocean Nomad* rig 100 miles east of Aberdeen were amazed to see what they described as a 'penguin' sized bird swim into the field of view of their video camera, 292 feet down. Subsequent examination of the video clearly shows a Guillemot swimming in circles for approximately 30 seconds. The previous depth record for this species is 197 feet. Water pressure at 292 feet is approximately 10 times greater than at the surface and would instantly squeeze the air out of a human diver's lungs.

Common Tern *Dave Mitchell*

Sandeels and fisheries

The Shetland Sandeel fishery reopened this year with the same management regime as in 1995. Controls on the fishery are that the maximum catch must not exceed 3,000 tonnes; landing may only be made at Lerwick; the fishery closes on 30 June and only named vessels less than or equal to 20 metres overall length are eligible.

Since 1974, mean landings from the Shetland fishery have been 15,000 tonnes, with a record landing of 50,000 tonnes in 1981-82. In the following years, thousands of seabird chicks in Shetland starved to death. Sandeels are an important food for many species of seabird and commercially important fish. The Scottish Office states that environmental factors (such as current flow) are thought to explain the decline prior to 1991. The fishery was reopened in 1995, when only 1,165 tonnes were landed.

Meanwhile Greenpeace began a campaign against the industrial fishery of Sandeels in the North Sea, particularly off the Firth of Forth. This mainly involves Danish boats. Greenpeace achieved their usual media coverage but also some success in their relations with local, inshore fisherman who consider that the industrial fishery is detrimental to their own livelihoods.

Global warming

Droughts, floods and the spread of disease are all likely to increase across Britain by the middle of the next century as the country suffers the effects of global warming. Scotland could lose certain species, notably Ptarmigan and Mountain Hares, as its climate becomes both warmer and wetter. Following the publication of a report by the UK Climate Change Impact Review Group on behalf of the Department of Environment, the Environment Secretary, John Gummer, said: "We are talking about something that is going to happen within our lifetime"

Earlier this year, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change agreed that not only was global warming already happening, but that human activity - the production of so called greenhouse gases - was almost certainly a contributing factor. While severe winters will still occur, extremely mild winters such as that of 1988-89 will change from being a one in 30 year event to a one in 5 year event by the middle of the 21st century. A rise in mean temperatures of 1.5 degrees by 2050 is a rate of change equivalent to a northward shift of climate zones by up to c80km every 10 years, which would effectively decrease the height of mountains in Scotland by up to 55 metres per year.

The amount and availability of water across the UK is also expected to alter over the next 60 years. Annual rainfall over the whole country will increase by 5% by 2020 and by nearly 10% 30 years later. Much of that will fall on Scotland and the north west of England, while the south of England will have long, dry summers and droughts. Other weather changes will include an average seasonal wind speed increase over most of the country, with the frequency of gales increasing by the 2050s by up to 30%.

Droughts in the south of England could lead to permanent mechanisms for the transport of water from the north or, stringent conservation measures. People living north of a line roughly between Bristol and Newcastle should expect to suffer flooding on a more regular basis. Combined with the gradual sinking of eastern Britain and the current erosion of eastern coasts, the rise in sea level will present huge problems for government. Cost benefit analysis by some scientists has already concluded that in some cases it will be more economical simply to allow whole areas to sink beneath the sea.

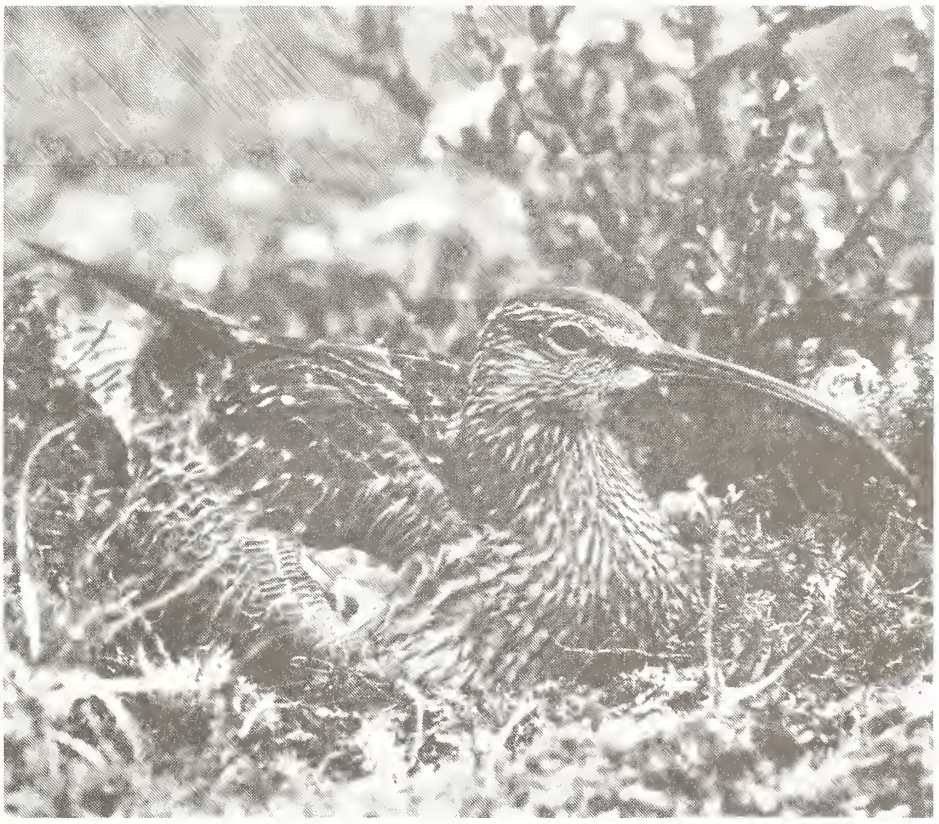
An increase in carbon dioxide will stimulate plant productivity, but adverse effects on soil and more pests, weeds and diseases could reduce yields. Reduced water supplies in the south and east of the UK, coupled with higher temperatures and evaporation, could shift production of arable crops north and west. Grassland productivity in the wetter north and west would be sustained by warmer winters and the boundaries of forage maize cultivation could continue northwards. Warmer and drier summers will increase opportunities for new crops. The effect on global production will be an increase in prices of food.

Increased summer temperatures will result in several thousand extra deaths a year during heat waves, but there will be a compensatory effect produced by warmer winters, leading to a reduction in deaths from hypothermia. The expected increase in storms and floods is likely to lead to more deaths and injuries. These are identifiable effects of changing temperatures, but the report says the indirect effects are likely to prove more significant.

These include a greater risk from infectious diseases, a potential rise in allergies and the risk to public health from water shortages because of reduced supplies of fresh water. As the world warms up, there is a danger that serious infectious diseases, such as Malaria, could extend beyond their current limits. Malaria existed in the UK for several thousand years, but was eradicated largely by the drainage of wetlands and the use of insecticides.

Bacteria and other organisms that can contaminate food or drinking water supplies would proliferate. The report says this could lead to increases of between 5 and 20% in cases of food poisoning by the year 2050.

Only the most mobile insects and birds will make it across the Channel. Some migrants could establish regular breeding populations. Among them are birds such as the Golden Oriole, Hoopoe and Bee-eater. The Dartford Warbler, Harvest Mouse and Noctule Bat are all species expected to widen their ranges. The increase in temperatures is likely to reduce the amount and duration of snow cover on Scottish mountains which will threaten the survival of species such as Ptarmigan and Mountain Hare. Other birds likely to be threatened include Dotterel, Whimbrel, Greenshank and Redwing.



Whimbrel *John Chapman*

From grey to green - birdwatching in the changing environment of Musselburgh lagoons

The fly ash lagoons at Musselburgh are one of Scotland's best known birdwatching sites. They were created in the 1960s by the South of Scotland Electricity Board, now ScottishPower, by reclaiming the intertidal area known as Musselburgh Sands. Almost immediately waders, gulls and terns were attracted to the lagoons as roost sites while the sea wall allowed close observation of sea ducks, divers and grebes. Birdwatchers have visited the lagoons over the last 30 years and an account was published in SBN in 1987. Now the lagoons have been filled in and landscaped to leave 2 active lagoons

Grey vista

What was once a grey vista of fly ash and concrete is becoming greener by the day. The lagoons which have been filled in have been landscaped and large numbers of mainly broad leaved trees have been planted. The landscaped areas have been, or will be, handed over to East Lothian Council and, with aid from ScottishPower, a ranger is employed to manage the site. Eventually the whole area of the lagoons will be handed over to the council for recreation. The aim is to balance the wildlife interest of the site with the other recreational uses to which it is put, everything from Sunday afternoon strolls to windsurfing.

Access

There are a number of access routes to the lagoons which are situated on the northern side of Musselburgh and stretch from the mouth of the Esk east to Prestongrange.

From the town of Musselburgh the most traditional access route is from Goosegreen beside the river. If entering here park, carefully, opposite the houses and in front of the cadet hut, then walk round the huts. A newer access route is by car from the main Musselburgh-Prestonpans road where a sign points to Levenhall Links. This route takes you down to the Boating Pond where there is parking but the dirt and gravel road is rather rough and should be taken slowly. A third access point is at the Prestongrange end at Morrison's Haven where the Council has created a new car park.

Birds of the river and the sea

Most people follow the sea wall from Goosegreen. At low tide the mussel beds and flats of Fisherrow Sands on the other side of the Esk are exposed. In winter most of the common waders can be seen feeding here. Winter interest is also in the gulls which gather to bathe and roost in the late afternoon. Searches through the assembled **Black-headed** and **Common Gulls** can produce regular **Mediterranean**

Some of the thousands of shorebirds which roost at Musselburgh *Stan da Prato*

Gulls and, as winter turns to spring, **Iceland, Glaucous** and **Ring-billed Gulls** may add excitement. In recent years increasing numbers of **Gadwall** have wintered at Musselburgh and **Pintail, Scaup** and **Goosander** may be seen at the mouth of the Esk. During the summer a roost of **Sandwich Terns** gathers here often joined by **Common** and **Arctic Terns.** These flocks sometimes attract the interest of a raptor, usually a local **Sparrowhawk** but sometimes a **Peregrine** or a **Merlin.**

At high tide the waders fly onto the lagoon to roost along with variable numbers of gulls. The best conditions to look for the rarer gulls are when there is a very high tide and a roughish sea. If the sea is too calm then the gulls will roost at sea; too windy and Musselburgh can be too uncomfortable for the birdwatcher. The roost gives you a chance to get a good, close look at the waders. The commoner waders are present throughout the year though the numbers vary. In summer terns also roost here and this gives you the best chance of seeing the scarcer **Roseate** and **Little Terns. Black Terns** occur in varying numbers, usually in late summer and early autumn.

The sea wall

The sea is closer to the wall as you walk east. Scan the sea with a telescope and you will get good views of sea ducks. **Eider, Goldeneye** and **Red-breasted Merganser** are familiar to most birdwatchers but there are few places in Britain where you can see them at such close range. In addition, you can expect to see the striking **Long-tailed Duck**, and, on calm days, hear its distinctive courtship calls. **Velvet Scoter** are currently the most numerous of the Scoters and are present throughout the year. **Common Scoters** are uncommon and tend to turn up in summer. **Surf Scoter** occasionally occurs, presumably wandering from one of the bays to the east where this species is more often seen.

Guillemots and **Razorbills** are usually present offshore throughout the year while **Puffins** can be seen on summer evenings. From August to early May grebes are a highlight of any visit to Musselburgh. **Great Crested Grebes** are the commonest followed by **Slavonian Grebes. Red-necked Grebes** are present in most winters but larger numbers of these occur further

east at Gosford and Gullane Bays. **Red-throated Divers** can occur in large numbers but their **Black-throated** cousins are scarcer though regularly seen. **Great Northern Divers** are very scarce but one or 2 are seen in most years. The best places to look for divers and grebes are the sewage outfall, between the eastern lagoon and the scrape, and 'The Point' where the sea wall is at its furthest out.

Skuas pass the Lagoons in late summer and autumn but in smaller numbers than at Hound Point further up the Forth. All 4 species of northern skua are regularly seen, although you would have to be lucky to see a **Long-tailed Skua.** Summer also sees movements of other seabirds and these movements are best viewed from 'The Point'.

Land birds

The landscaping of the reclaimed lagoons has changed the habitat and therefore birds which can be seen. Around the lagoons the rough grass is home to populations of **Skylarks** and **Meadow Pipits** in both summer and winter, when **Linnets** and large numbers of **Stock Doves** also feed in the grass. The sea wall is used by **Pied Wagtails** and **Rock Pipits** but the tidying up of the landscape seems to have made both **Snow** and **Lapland Buntings** scarcer. In spring and autumn **Wheatears, White Wagtails** and **Yellow Wagtails** pass through Musselburgh and prefer these grassed areas. **Kestrels** and **Short-eared Owls** hunt for voles in the rough grass during the winter.

ScottishPower have invested a lot of money, time and effort to landscape the reclaimed lagoons and to create a Boating Pond. A mixture of trees has been planted to screen off buildings and give shelter from the winds. These trees have attracted birds to the lagoons which were previously rare there. Migrants such as **Stonechat, Whinchat, Chiffchaff, Lesser Whitethroat** and **Pied Flycatcher** have all been seen in the plantings while passerines have colonised the new trees for nesting in. In winter thrushes and finches use the trees for feeding and roosting.

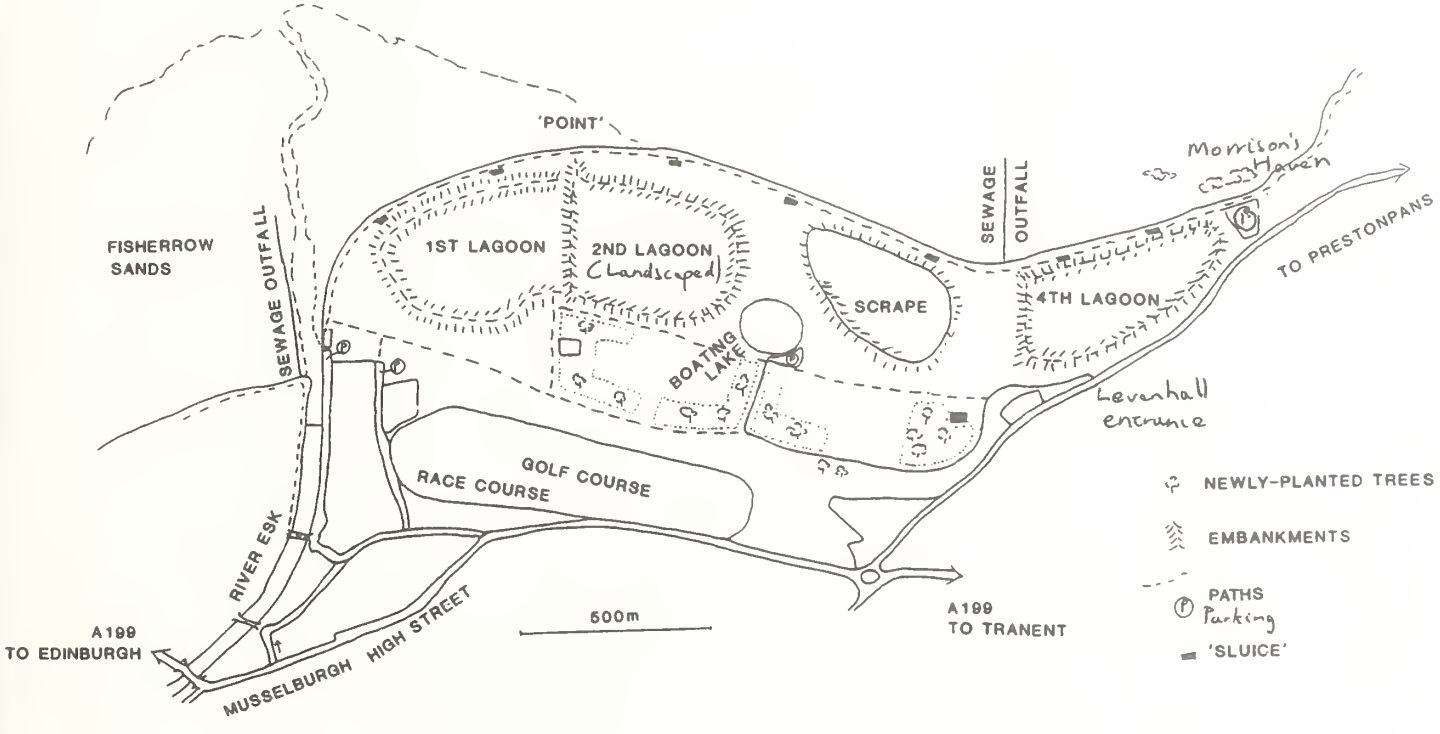
The Boating Pond sometimes has birds on it, usually bathing gulls or diving ducks and it is here that **Tufted Duck, Pochard** or **Coot** are most likely to be seen. **Swifts** and hirundines feed over the pond and the scrape but only the **Swallows** nest, using the old concrete sluice gates. The first **Common Sandpiper** of the year is often seen around the boating pond in mid April.

The new scrape

The potential jewel in Musselburgh's crown is the Wader Scrape created by ScottishPower at a not insignificant cost in 1993. The access to the scrape is near the Boating Pond, over the fence beside the 'Bird Reserve' sign. These signs ask you not to enter or disturb the 'reserve' but the ranger does not object to people looking at the scrapes from behind the bank. Do not go above the horizon as this may flush birds.

The Scrape consists of 6 shallow pools lined with clay and filled with water from the river mouth. The levels are managed by the ranger to ensure that the pools do not get dried out. The periodic influx of brackish water brings with it some small fish, such as Sticklebacks, and many invertebrates.

The Scrape has allowed the Lagoons to become more attractive to freshwater ducks such as **Teal,** the occasional **Garganey, Pintail** and **Shoveler.** Waders more typical of freshwater habitats such



as **Spotted Redshank, Greenshank, Wood Sandpiper, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper** and **Black-tailed Godwit** are attracted by this new habitat. Good numbers of **Common Sandpipers** feed here in late summer but, as yet, the expected **Green Sandpiper** has not appeared. Probably the best watched bird to appear on the Scrape to date was an **Avocet** during January-February 1996. The bird which uses the Scrape almost all year is the **Ruff.** The Musselburgh **Ruff** are said to be the northernmost regularly wintering in the world.

When to go

Winter is usually quite productive at Musselburgh, especially on calm sunny days when you can see all the birds on the sea. At this time of year you can expect to see 50+ species in a half day.

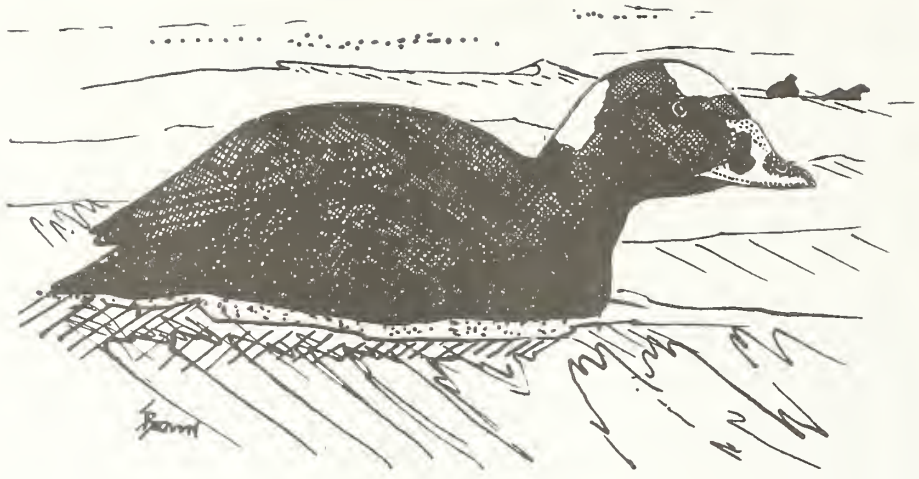
Rarities are less frequent in winter than at other times but, in recent years, **Surf Scoter, Avocet, Grey Phalarope** and **Forster's Tern** have been recorded at this time of year. This is the best time for sea ducks and the more uncommon divers. In easterlies large numbers of **Little Auks** may be driven into the Forth.

Spring is the best time to see scarce gulls when large numbers of Common Gulls pass through in April. A few common migrants pass through. The **Long-tailed Ducks,** grebes and divers acquire their summer plumages from April and passage waders and terns stage here on their way north. Rarities which have been seen in the last few springs include **Temminck's Stint, Brunnich's Guillemot, Laughing Gull** and **Franklin's Gull.**

Summer is the quietest time as few birds nest at Musselburgh, although the new woods have brought more breeding birds in. Small numbers of non breeding waders may remain and, from mid July, the waders begin their return passage south.

Numbers of waders begin to build up in autumn. **Little Stints** and **Curlew Sandpipers** can be seen among the **Dunlin** while ducks such as **Pintail** and **Shoveler** arrive with the **Wigeon.** In late September and early October the passage of **Barnacle Geese** can be spectacular. Recent autumn rarities include **Red-crested Pochard, Pectoral Sandpiper, Buff-breasted Sandpiper** and **Lesser Crested Tern.**

David Kelly



Surf Scoter *Steven Brown*

Salmon and the Scottish Office

The Scottish Office sanctions the slaughter of 1,000 fish eating birds each year, even though all are protected species. It issues licences to local fishery boards, angling associations and fish farmers who class the birds a serious threat to their livelihoods.

In the past 13 years it has approved the shooting of 4,946 Goosanders, 3,730 Red-breasted Mergansers and 4,420 Cormorants.

SOC President Ray Murray told the press: This cull is carried out without any scientific evidence. There is no proof that these birds do serious damage to fish stocks.

A Scottish Office spokesman said, "Licences are issued on the basis of scientific evidence and to prevent serious damage to fisheries".

Unusual Pied Wagtail behaviour

On 15 October 1995, I was counting wildfowl on the flooded fields adjacent to Biggar Water, Lanarkshire, when my attention was drawn to a House Martin, feeding low over the rushes. As I watched, a Pied Wagtail flew towards the martin and appeared to harass or buffet it. This was repeated several times by 2 individual wagtails, and, on one occasion, by both at once. The episode lasted less than a minute and the martin then used its superior speed to move out of the way. It was not clear if competition for food was a factor. I thank David Thorne for his assistance in compiling this note.

John Shirley

Birds of a West Lothian garden

In 1967 ours was the last house in Linlithgow before open fields. Now we are surrounded by housing schemes, street lamps and gardens. There are many other gardens with bird tables. We feel the secrets for maximum enjoyment are to have the feeding station close to a window but with some good cover close to it to make a safe approach and refuge for the birds. We can tell at once when the Sparrowhawk is around as the birds dive for cover in the Cotoneaster.

It helps to have a bird bath, the bigger the better (an upturned dustbin lid is excellent), close by. Water is as important as food in very hard weather. This winter it had to be renewed 3 times a day. We never clear leaves or autumn debris the way the gardening books tell you to, as the thrushes need leaf litter for winter feeding. All seedheads are left. Bullfinches particularly come to the dead flowerheads. We feed a good seed mixture and porridge oats mixed, which is cheaper than specialised softbill food and just as popular.

We get through sacks of peanuts. A perch pushed through the wire of a nut feeder enables the finches to use the resource as well as the tits. I have seen a Blackcap on one side and a Siskin on the other, with a Blue Tit hanging upside down below them. Cock Bramblings are a special treat with their bright orange breast bands running up over their shoulders making a vivid flash of colour. The hens, too, are attractive, with brightly patterned backs and heads and the flash of white between the wings on the rump when they fly.

Chris Mylne

Press round up

We are again indebted to SCENES, an independant digest of Scottish environmental issues which covers published material on the Scottish environment, for some of these items. The SOC Library has a reciprocal arrangement whereby *Scottish Bird News* is exchanged for *SCENES*. We can only reprint a small selection of articles most relevant to ornithology. Anyone wanting a specimen copy and subscription details should write, phone or fax to **Michael & Sue Scott, Editors *SCENES*, Strome House, North Strome, Lochcarron, Ross-shire IV54 8YJ. (tel: 01520 722588; fax: 01520 722660).**

Uist SSSI

Crofters and landowners in North Uist have protested about proposals by SNH to designate an extended area of Loch Scadavay as an SSSI. The proposed new SSSI would cover 8,000 hectares. Red-throated and Black-throated Divers, and a range of waders and wildfowl nest in the area, which includes the largest freshwater body in North Uist.

The factor of the local estate said "The feeling is that the area is not under any threat. Control of the area is being taken away from the crofting community and the estate, and no consideration has been given to the economic effect that the agency's proposals could have on the existing and future use".

The SNH area manager for the Western Isles said the crofter and estate were unnecessarily upset. "Most of the things the crofters are doing are all right. However, if they wanted to develop something new - such as forestry - there would have to be a consultation process, with the possibility of a management agreement."

Protected sites news

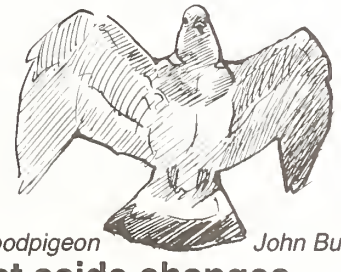
The RSPB is to buy Onziebust Farm on Egilsay in Orkney. The 145 hectare farm is one of the last strongholds of the Corncrake, with 7 males heard calling there last year. The RSPB believes that numbers could double with suitable managment. RSPB also plans to lease the island of Oransay, which adjoins Colonsay in Argyll. It estimates that, with suitable management, the 595 hectare island could hold 10 pairs of Corncrakes.

Pressmennan Wood

Several papers report on controversy over plans to thin and feel trees in Pressmennan Wood, Stenton, East Lothian. The wood was listed as ancient woodland in a survey by the Nature Conservancy Council.

The plan is for selective felling so that a canopy of trees is retained, but with enough timber taken out for new planting, including some native species. The application under the Woodland Grant Scheme includes the thinning of 361 trees and felling of 194 in an area of 8.3 hectares, estimated to hold 900 trees, on the north side of Pressmennan Lake. The application was made by a woodland management company on behalf of the owner to whom the felled timber could be worth £10,000. Campaigners have expressed concern that the contract for the felling has gone to a Northumberland timber company who clear cut an area in Lothian, in contravention of a licence for selective felling issued by the Forestry Authority. An FA spokesman confirmed that an investigation was underway into the reportedly illegal felling.

The Woodland Trust, which bought another part of Pressmennan Wood several years ago to protect it from felling, has said it is, prepared to purchase the disputed woodland on which East Lothian Council has now issued a tree preservation order. A spokesman said that the FA had failed to consult SNH about the felling plan, but SNH had now expressed concern about the proposal.



Woodpigeon *John Busby*

Set aside changes

The government has announced changes from 1997 to the rules controlling the management of set aside land, to benefit wildlife. These permit larger areas of set aside to be left uncut, to allow farmers more freedom in creating a range of habitats. Because farmers now control weeds on set aside land using herbicides, it is proposed that, from next year, farmers will be banned from cutting set aside between 15 April and 1 July, where the set aside has been sprayed with a non selective herbicide. At present they can cut set aside at any time and plough it after 1 May, but this is highly damaging to ground nesting birds.

The Arisaig Hotel

Family run hotel on Arisaig Bay looking over to the island of Eigg. Arisaig provides access to both moorland and coastline offering a great variety of habitats to naturalists. There are boat trips from the harbour opposite the hotel out to the Small Isles - Eigg, Muck and Rum with frequent sightings of whales and dolphins. Accessible by train Arisaig is an ideal location for a holiday that combines seashore, mountains and boat trips.

For more information contact Mr & Mrs Ross, Arisaig Hotel, Arisaig, Inverness-shire PH39 4NH. Tel 01687 450210 Fax 01687 450310

Conservation jobs

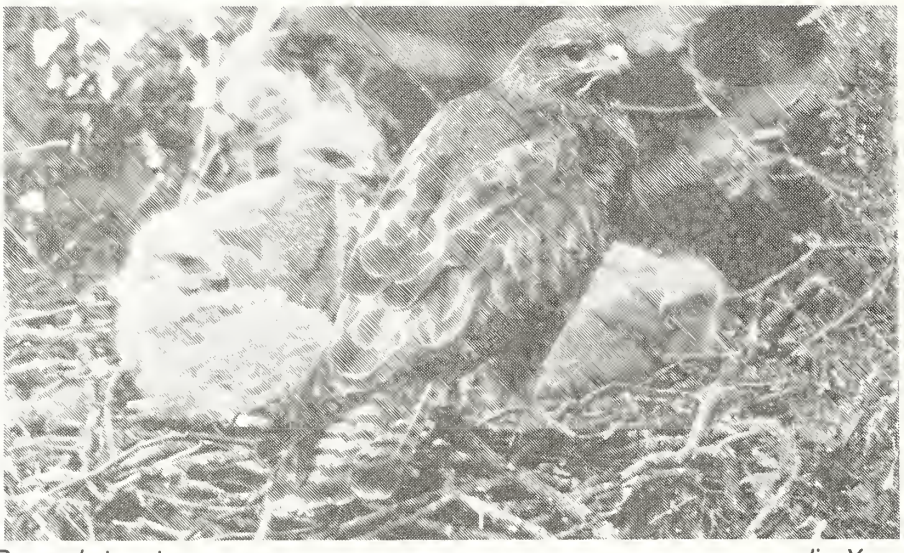
An RSPB report, *Nature conservation, employment and local economics,* has concluded that nature conservation provides direct employment for over 10,000 people in the UK. Many of these jobs are in rural areas with few alternative employment opportunites.

Longman tip

SNH and officials of the new Highland Council are said to be at loggerheads over plans to extend the existing Longman tip on the shore of the Moray Firth at Inverness. SNH informed the council last September of plans to designate the coastline from the present tip boundary eastwards as far as Fisherton, on account of the internationally important numbers of waders and wildfowl on the mudflats there. However, the former Inverness district and Highland Regional Councils objected to the notification, which they said was premature and would prejudice discussions on extending the tip.

Highland Council regards extension of the tip as one of the main options for disposing of refuse from Inverness, Nairn and Ross & Cromarty when the existing tip is filled in about 6 years time.

Local papers say that the issue "highlights the disquiet in some quarters at the growing number of SSSIs" 1,300 of Britain's 5,000 SSSIs are in the Highlands, covering some 10% of the region.



Buzzard at nest *Jim Young*

Transmitter technology could help Slender-billed Curlews

Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corporation (NTT) is developing a super light transmitter for the satellite tracking of migratory birds. The new transmitter weights only 15grams and will allow conservationists to track medium sized migratory birds, like herons, ducks and waders. NTT is working with BirdLife International with the long term aim of tracking the Slender-billed Curlew, one of Europe's most critically threatened birds.

The Slender-billed Curlew may be on the verge of extinction. Very little is known about where it breeds, where it winters, or exactly how many of the very small population still survive. Previously, the smallest transmitter (also developed by NTT) was 40g, too heavy for most birds to carry, although it did prove useful in the tracking of larger species such as swans and cranes.

Signals from the transmitter are received by an American meteorological satellite. The signals are relayed to receiving stations in 3 different places in the world. The International Information Handling Centre in France then determines the location of the birds by analysing data from all 3 receiving stations.

The prototype transmitter, due to be available later this year, will first be tested on a species of wader of similar size. The RSPB, the BirdLife Partner in the UK, will run the trials which are scheduled for early 1997. If the system works and meets the necessary requirements permission will then be sought to put a transmitter on a Slender-billed Curlew.

Snowy Owl stories

At least one Sunday paper recently publicised the fact that individual owls are occasionally seen on Scottish mountains. The inference that they may be breeding there is not supported by SOC members who regularly visit the Cairngorms which is the area where sightings are most likely.

Letters to the editor

Department of Zoology
Aberdeen University
2 June 1996

Sir & Ma'am,

Buzzards & Rabbits

Surely there is also another factor besides a reduction of persecution and an increase in carrion (*SBN* 41:7 and 42:13) in the welcome resurgence of the Buzzard? While it apparently began with the disruption of game preservation during World Ward 2, and a subsequent improvement in attitude in those involved in it, it then seems to have been delayed for many years by the reduction of Rabbits following the introduction of Myxomatosis in the 1950s. While Buzzards may have difficulty in killing adult Rabbits, most nests that I have inspected have been littered with the remains of young ones, whose increasing availability may be a key factor in enabling the birds to rear more chicks. Surely it is only since Rabbits became more resistant to Myxomatosis that Buzzard (and also Kite and Fox) populations have exploded? This is an important consideration because if these birds feed largely on Rabbits this justifies their conservation.

W R P Bourne

11 Restenneth Place
Lunanhead, Forfar
4 June 1996

Dear Editor

Increase in Buzzards

I noted the letter of March 1996 by Gilmour Steven attributing the recent widespread increase of Buzzards to carrion in the form of fallen stock being left in exposed conditions. This is illegal and I doubt if it is a widespread practice, at least to the extent that it is significant in providing Buzzards with additional protein at critical times to affect breeding performance. Nor is there a general contention among landowners and their keepers not to molest and kill Buzzards, Foxes and other predators so that they may increase and assist to dispose of 'fallen stock' or any other forms of carrion, for example deer.

Buzzards may well be increasing generally but the behaviour of some keepers, especially on estates involved in massive obscene Pheasant rearing programmes, remains blinkered and oppressive towards all potential predators. In my view, the widespread increase may be attributable to 2 factors. Firstly, the continued dramatic increase in the distribution and density of the Buzzard's main prey item, the Rabbit, but, much more importantly, the development and widespread acceptance and use by keepers during the last decade of the Larsen Trap. A Larsen is basically a small portable spring trap with a live Crow used as a decoy. They are sited within the Crow's territory and have proved very efficient in trapping both adults of a pair, the trap then being moved easily and swiftly to the next new site. In turn this has led to fewer poisoned baits being laid out in the form of 'doped' eggs or 'treated rabbit' to specifically kill Crows.

Buzzards are particularly susceptible to the indiscriminate use of poison and have undoubtedly benefited from even a small reduction in its use. If my supposition is correct it also serves to underline the massive effect that illegal use of poison has had on the population overall. Of course the widespread use of noxious substances to kill predators continues and bird watchers should remain vigilant and report any suspected cases. In addition, protected species are often trapped in Crow traps including Buzzard, Kestrel, Sparrowhawk and Merlin in the small Larsen Traps and, to judge from Angus, not all are released unharmed. Any such fatalities should similarly be reported to the proper authorities.

John Young

REVIEWS

The Birds of Israel *by Hadoram Shirihai, 1996. Academic Press, 692 pp. £65 hardback. ISBN 0-12-640255-8.*

This long awaited book can only be described in terms of superlatives - at 3.5 kg even its weight is extraordinary and makes *BWP* look puny! This is a model avifauna and, for students of Israeli and Middle East birds, will doubtless remain the bible for many years. It contains something for every birder whose interests range from bird distribution, migration and photography to systematics and breeding biology. Identification is not included, but you need look no further than the new *Macmillan Birder's Guide* (also co written by the prolific Hadoram Shirihai).

The introductory chapters are thorough and highly informative, and the bulk of the text is packed with painstakingly collected data on all 511 species on the Israeli List. Unfortunately, there is possibly too much information, making it difficult to do more than delve into some species accounts - you may also have difficulty reading for very long simply because it is too heavy! Some facts are mind boggling, eg for White-winged Black Tern "20,015 [passed through Eilat] between 14.30 and 18.00 hours (15,000 between 16.30 and 17.30) and largest flock 8,000".

The photographs are a feast for the eye and worthy of a book in their own right. I have few quibbles, but with, my interest in neighbouring Jordan, I spotted numerous references to previously unpublished (and unreferenced) Jordanian records - I am following this up! Separate sections relating to Sinai are included for all species, but this area was handed back to Egypt in 1982 and was also included in that country's avifauna.

Hadoram Shirihai and his extensive team of fellow field workers, advisors, consultants and editors must be commended on their work, especially in a region which otherwise relies so heavily on visiting birdwatchers.

Ian J Andrews

Annual Review of the World Pheasant Association 1994-95. *edited by David Jenkins, World Pheasant Association, Reading. 99pp ISBN 0 906864 25 9.*

This is the second year that the WPA have produced this type of Annual Review. Like its predecessor it is attractively produced and well illustrated on good quality paper. Besides information on the affairs of the Association and its specialist working groups it contains a number of papers reporting on fieldwork and captive breeding. Much of the work is on Asiatic species; there is also an interesting review article on the role of birds in sustainable food production.

Stan da Prato

Where to watch birds in northeast England, Northumberland, Tyne & Wear, Durham and Cleveland *Dave Britton & John Day 1995 Helm,382pp. £12.99. ISBN 0-7136-3847-8*

This is a worthy addition to the Helm Where to Watch series covering as it does an area within easy reach of south Scotland. The 75 major sites included illustrate the diversity of habitats and these are comprehensively described according to access, best times to visit and species possible, combined in many cases with maps and OS references. There is a list of further reading and a useful glossary of terms.

At many sites the hand of man has been in evidence but this time to the benefit of birds when reserves and habitats have resulted from industrial activities such as open cast mining, gravel extraction, subsidence ponds and reservoirs a number of which have excellent hides. We in Scotland could learn from this particularly in wet land habitat creation and even more so in the provision of hides at suitable areas.

This excellent publication is a necessity when venturing south of Berwick whether its just for a day or longer.

Keith Macgregor

William MacGillivray: A Hebridean Naturalist's Journal 1817-1818. *ed. Dr Robert Ralph, Acair. 167pp Hardback. ISBN 0-86152-127-7*

1996 marks the bicentenary of the birth of Wm MacGillivray, one of Britain's greatest yet least known naturalist's and wildlife artist's. In connection with this event a nicely produced volume has been published. It is a transcript of a previously unpublished journal dealing mainly with a year's residence and travels in the Isle of Harris. It starts with an account of his walk from Aberdeen across Scotland to Ross-shire in August 1817 from where he sailed over to Lewis.

It is a fascinating account packed with original observations of wildlife, particularly of birds and plants. There are 7 fine colour plates of birds which clearly demonstrate his artistic talent. Two appendices contain, firstly, several lists of plants identified on his walk from Aberdeen and, secondly, a glossary of places and persons in Harris, complete with family tree. This most interesting volume is worthy of a place in any naturalist's library and is an excellent companion to Dr Ralph's earlier biography of this great man.

David Clugston

Library news

From mid October, one or other of the library team will normally be around most mornings of the week, as a way of improving the availability of the library to members. However, this is not a firm commitment, and users are advised to phone the office in advance, especially if coming from a distance. This arrangement is additional to the more flexible arrangements for access outlined in SBN 42.

Some sections of books have been rearranged. A reserve collection is now in the basement where the Lending Library used to be. This consists at present of most of the non bird books (botany, insects etc) and others thought to be out of date or now less appropriate to the collection. It may be extended. Existing books in the main library have been moved by up to 2 shelves to create an even spread of much needed space for new books.

All Scottish county and local Bird Reports are now together on old Lending Library shelves, and non Scottish Bird Reports may join them soon.

John Law, Librarian

Library open day

On Saturday 23 November 1996 there will be an Open Day between 1000hrs - 1600hrs.

There will be a display of some of the more interesting books and archival material for visitors to inspect. Members of the Library Committee will be on hand to answer questions and show people around. We maintain a small lending section which includes many of the standard handbooks and British journals. This will be an ideal opportunity for all those members who have not been to Regent Terrace to come along and see what we have in this very important ornithological collection.

In addition, we will be offering for sale a selection of duplicate books and journals in aid of Library funds.

Anniversary in Assynt

At 9pm on Friday 31 May 1996, 34 members of the SOC assembled in the Culag Hotel, Lochinver, for the club's 60th anniversary celebration weekend, having travelled from a' the airts. Seventeen of the number were to stay in the Culag Hotel with the rest of the party being dispersed to various B&B's and hotels in the vicinity.

At that time the weather forecast for the next day was for high winds and the outlook for a visit to the island of Handa was not too bright. Next morning the wind was blowing at almost gale force and all thoughts of Handa were dismissed. Another 2 members arrived at Lochinver on the Saturday and, although windy with frequent heavy rain showers, it was bright and sunny. The members spent their day 'doing their own thing' in small groups touring Assynt to the north of Lochinver, and so back to our various lodgings in time to change for the 60th anniversary dinner at the Inchnadamph Hotel.

Unfortunately none of the surviving founder members of the club were able to attend the celebration dinner, but they were ably represented by Dr Ian Pennie. After an excellent meal a cake, beautifully decorated with the SOC crest, was cut by Ian.

The weather was marginally better on Sunday, but no boats were operating to Handa. Instead, Doug Mainland, who lives in Lochinver, split the party into 3 groups and advised them about the best places to see birds in the Strath Oykel area.

In the evening most of the party met in a local restaurant for a meal and 'nightjars'. On route between the Culag Hotel and the chosen restaurant some members of the group had very good views of an Otter eating an Eel as it sat on a rock close to the promenade.

Yes, we did see birds during the visit. One member's list totalled 69 different species, including Greenshank, Golden Eagle, Black-throated Diver, Stonechat, Redstart and Redwing.

The visit ended on Monday morning. Apart from the strong winds preventing the visit to Handa, the general consensus was that it had been an excellent venture. Thanks are due to Sylvia Laing and Pamela Black who must be congratulated for the excellent organisation of the whole event.

Angus Smith

Birthday cake *Angus Smith*

Murder on the moors

On 1 June 1996, during the SOC 60th Anniversary weekend in Assynt, David and Mary Weeks and I were watching a Red-throated Diver on a small lochan on the Stoer peninsula. We were trying to locate the second bird of the pair which, we felt sure, must be nearby.

A Great Skua was observed flying low over the moor towards the lochan. When it was about 30 yards from the water a female Mallard rose from a marshy area and flew off fast over the lochan, twisting and turning to avoid the pursuing skua. The duck circled the lochan once or twice but was unable to shake off its attacker. The Mallard then, perhaps unwisely, turned back and crash landed in the water, immediately diving to escape the attentions of the skua and surfacing in a patch of reeds in the middle of the lochan. Each time that it surfaced, the skua attacked it with its beak and by holding its head under water, occasionally flying off a short distance but returning almost immediately to the attack.

Meanwhile, the second diver had appeared and both divers attempted to drive the skua off; it was noticeable that the skua never attacked the divers whose concern was no doubt for their eggs or young. With each attack from the skua the duck's struggles became weaker until eventually it lay lifeless on the surface of the water. The skua then proceed to tow it to the edge of the lochan where it began to eat the Mallard, which it was still doing when we left the area.

None of us had previously seen a Great Skua attacking a duck. BWP does list ducks amongst the Bonxie's prey and states that ducks and geese are frequent in its diet in Iceland. No other participants on the Anniversary weekend, to whom we later mentioned this incident, had observed anything similar and it was suggested that a note recording what we had seen might be of wider interest.

Donald Stewart

Reports on studies aided by Endowment Fund grants issued in 1995

In 1995, money from the Endowment Fund was given to support 8 projects and to date we have received reports on 5 of these. Andrew Ramsay and David Butterfield are working on hirundines in Easter Ross. They report a decline in the numbers of breeding Swallows in 2 study areas, from 69 pairs in 1992 to 30 pairs in 1995. The annual loss has been consistent at 24% each year, despite good breeding success. In 1995, initial clutch sizes were low but brood sizes were high, associated with good summer weather. Annual late summer catches of Swallows at an inland reedbed roost have also declined by about 24% pa, consistent with the change in breeding numbers, but juveniles in the 1995 catch were fewer than expected from the breeding studies. It seems that factors outside the breeding area are responsible for the population decline. The decline is alarming and obviously deserves further scrutiny.

Andrew Ramsay and pupils from Tain Royal Academy have also received support for monitoring the breeding of Manx Shearwaters on Rum. In 1995, the number of study burrows increased from 64 to 107, the aim being to increase this to 150 monitored burrows from 1996 onwards. Some wooden marker pegs had been removed by deer and these were replaced with metal labels. Four parts of the colony are monitored, 2 on the edge and 2 in the centre, but there were no significant differences in the 1995 data from different parts. Of 107 burrows, 80 contained eggs and 70 (83% of nest attempts) were successful. Birds caught for ringing included 568 adults and 167 chicks, and 49 ringed birds were recaptured including 2 from 1974.

Bill Taylor has been monitoring a Crested Tit population nesting in boxes in Culbin forest for many years. In 1995, 10 boxes were used; nest building in 7 began in mid April, and clutches were completed by the end of the month. Nests in the other 3 boxes were started in mid May, and laying finished by 5 June. Clutches were of 6 eggs, except for 2 of the late ones which were of 4 and 5 eggs. The commonest brood was of 6 nestlings and only one nest failed. Nine boxes produced 45 fledged young, all of which were ringed to facilitate winter studies. The current distribution of Crested Tits seems to depend on whether or not forest plantations are occupied so it is important to study them.

Andrew Thorpe has been studying Stonechats in Grampian, comparing the nesting and movements of birds breeding at the coast with those inland. In 1995 the birds bred well associated with good weather. Most broods were of 5 or 6 chicks and the season was prolonged, with the last brood fledged in August. Some local movements were recorded on the coast and one inland. More effort is to be given to inland sites in 1996. The data are now being analysed with a view to publication.

The Lothian Ringing Group has been monitoring seabird populations in the Firth of Forth for some years, recently supported by Endowment Fund grants. In 1995, they made 2 trips to Craigleith and 5 to Inchkeith. The breeding season was better than in 1994 and 1993. The decline in Fulmar numbers on Inchkeith halted with an increase in occupied sites to over 500. Shag numbers continued to be low but their breeding success was good. Kittiwakes and Puffins also had a better season than in 1994. Razorbills and Guillemots appeared to have increased in numbers again. A total of 775 seabirds were ringed including 140 adults. Some adults were recaptured and there were recoveries elsewhere of birds ringed in previous years. The analysis of Fulmar ringing recoveries has been completed and a paper will be submitted to *Scottish Birds*. Cormorant recoveries are also being analysed with a view to publication.

Mick Marquiss,
SOC Surveys and Research Committee

NOTICES

Scottish Ringers Conference 1996

The 1996 Scottish Ringers Conference will take place in the Fife Arms Hotel, Braemar over the weekend 15-17 November hosted by Highland Ringing Group. Contact **Bill Taylor, 22 Forbes Hill, Forres, Morayshire IV36 0JL (enclosing an SAE) or phone 01309 673099 (home) or 01309 672271 (work)**

Ringing migratory passerines

Volunteers are needed to assist a passerine ringing programme at Doñana National Park during September, October and November 1996. Contact **J J Chans, Estación Biológica de Doñana, Pabellón del Perú. Avda. Mª Luisa s/n. 41013 Sevilla.**

World conference on birds of prey and owls

This will take place from 4 August to 11 August 1998 in Midrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, hosted by the Raptor Conservation Group and Vulture Study Group of the Endangered Wildlife Trust, for more information please contact **Robin Chancellor, 15b Bolton Gardens, London SW5 0AL. Fax: Int+44-171-370-1896 or Dr U Meyburg, Wangenheimstrasse 32, 14193 Berlin, Germany. Fax: Int+30-892-8067**

Scottish Birds Records Committee - election of new member

This year the current Secretary, Ron Forrester, is now the longest serving member on the committee and, therefore, the post of Secretary will become that of a non-voting committee member. To replace Ron as a voting member the committee is nominating Ian Andrews. As well as being the Local Recorder for Lothian, Ian is an active birdwatcher who travels widely abroad, contributes regularly to publications and last year was the author of a book on the birds of Jordan.

Further nominations to fill the vacancy are invited and should be submitted to the SBRC Secretary by 31 October, being signed by both a proposer and seconder who must both be SOC members. If there should be more than one nomination, a postal ballot will take place, in which all SOC Local Recorders will be eligible to vote.

An annual rotation of committee members commenced in 1990. To date, there have been no nominations other than those put forward by SBRC. Does this mean that everyone is entirely happy with SBRC, or is it apathy by SOC members?
Ron Forrester, Secretary SBRC, 31 Argyle Terrace, Rothesay, Isle of Bute PA20 0BD.

Seabirds in the marine environment

A Symposium jointly sponsored by JNCC and the Seabird Group will take place at the University of Glasgow over the weekend 22-24 November 1996.

Anybody wishing further information should contact **Dr J B Reid, Seabirds in the Marine Environment Joint Nature Conservation Committee, 17 Rubislaw Terrace, Aberdeen AB1 1XE. Tel No 01224 642863**

MEMBERS' REQUESTS

Colour marked Oystercatchers

Sightings of yellow dye marked Oystercatchers, especially their breeding locations will be greatly appreciated by **Pat French, Grianan, Strone Road, Newtonmore, Inverness-shire PH20 1BA Tel. 01540 673719**

Colour marked Greylag Geese

Sightings of Greylags bearing dye marks, darvic rings or neck collars, together with details of colours and letters seen (no matter how incomplete), should be sent to: **Brian Etheridge, "Morven", Station Road, Avoch, Ross-shire, IV9 8RW. Telephone 01381 620098 (home) or 01463 715000 (work).**

Colour ringed Ring Ouzels

Any sightings of colour ringed Ring Ouzels will be greatly appreciated by **David Arthur, 12 Dundee Street, Carnoustie, Angus DD7 7PD. 01241 853356.**

Colour ringed Stonechats

All sightings will be acknowledged by **Andrew Thorpe, 30 Monearn Gardens, Milltimber, Aberdeen AB1 1YP**

Colour ringed Mute Swans - Lothian & Fife

Sightings should be sent to **Allan & Lyndesay Brown, 61 Watt's Gardens, Cupar, Fife, KY15 4UG (Telephone 01334 656804)** from whom further information can be obtained on the study.

Wing tagged Hen Harriers

Sightings however incomplete should be sent to **Brian Etheridge, RSPB North Scotland Office, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW tel 01463 715000** as soon as possible.

Wing tagged Red Kites and Sea Eagles

see SBN 40: pages 3 & 14

Colour ringed Reed Buntings

Reed buntings from sites in Lothian, Fife and Tayside are being colour ringed. Any sightings will be gratefullyreceived. If possible please note colour, which leg, and if above or below metal BTO ring. However, just the colour would be very useful. Details will be given to finders. Please inform **Clive Walton, 5 Corstorphine Hill Road, Edinburgh EH12 6JZ. Tel 0131 316 4638.**

SOC NOTICES

Annual Conference

This will take place on 1-3 November 1996 at the Duke of Gordon Hotel, Kingussie. The theme will be Sixty Years of Scottish Ornithology. Speakers will examine changes in the environment and their effects on Scotland's birdlife. Members who saw media reports of the extensive fire which damaged the hotel earlier this year should note that repair work is such that the hotel is confident that the Conference will go ahead. The Conference facilities were not damaged in the fire. Should bedrooms not be renovated in time the hotel has guaranteed to rehouse us locally.

A booking form which contains a full Conference programme is enclosed with this mailing.

Please also support the Annual raffle which this year is being organised by Stirling branch. All monies, ticket stubs and any additional prizes should be sent to **Eileen Lapthorn, Westburn, 2 Cromlix Cresc, Dunblane, Perthshire** or brought to the conference.

Photographic competition

Entries for this year's competition should be sent to 21 Regent Terrace no later than 18 October 1996. Slides and prints, colour or black and white, are acceptable. Prizes in the form of book tokens are awarded to the best 3 entries. Photographers should make sure that their entries are clearly labelled with their name, address and the species and locality concerned. Subjects must be wild birds photographed in Scotland and, where appropriate, licences should have been obtained. The judges are particularly keen to see photographs of common species away from the nest. Material will be returned as soon as possible after the Conference.

Art work in local bird reports

Starting this year the SOC is awarding cash prizes to the winning entries submitted by editors and artists. To qualify a drawing must have been published in a Scottish local bird report. This year awards went to Steven Brown, Peter Donnelly and Andrew Stevenson. Their drawings will be published in SBN starting with this issue. Both local reports and the SOC are always grateful for art work. Photocopies are perfectly acceptable. At present we rely on a small number of artists; it will spread the load and create more interest if more people contribute their work.

Conference entertainers

We're quite sure that SOC members are a multi-talented bunch, so at this year's conference we're encouraging all latent performers to step forward. Musicians, bring along your guitar, banjo, fiddle, your spoons or your Granny's washboard. Singers, give us a song, whether its an aria or Mother Kelly's Doorstep or anything in between. Do you know any poems, stories or jokes - share them with us. Ideally, contact **John Hamilton (01721) 722936** or at least be prepared to have your arm twisted on the night.

Tayside Branch 60th celebration

The branch is holding a film show by Chris Mylne on *The St Kilda Story* on 17 October 1996 at 1900hrs in the Methodist Church Hall, Marketgait, Dundee. Tickets £2 including refreshments can be obtained from **Ian McIntosh, 23a Rattray St, Monifieth, Angus DD5 4JU.**

Borders Branch 60th celebration

In celebration of the 60th anniversary of the club, Borders SOC cordially invite SOC members from all branches to a social evening with a buffet supper featuring a light hearted Inter-Group Wildlife Quiz with teams from the SOC, RSPB and SWT on Friday, 22 November at the George and Abbotsford Hotel, Melrose. Tickets will be £6 from **John Hamilton, Mailingsland, Peebles and at local meetings.**

Discussion Group

All members are welcome to attend, whether you live locally or come from afar. Meetings start at 7.30pm at 21 Regent Terrace, and are normally on the first Wednesday of the month apart from the summer. The dates for the rest of the year are: 4 September, 2 October, 6 November and 4 December. The first meeting of 1997 will be on 8 January 1997.

Thanks to

Thanks are once again due to the army of volunteers who willingly come into 21 every quarter and stuff envelopes. The stuffers for the June mailing were: John Ballantyne, Ian and Kath Craig, Neville Crowther, Rosemary Davidson, Sue Goode, John Law, Keith Macgregor and Ethel Russell.

With this issue

Enclosed with this issue are the *Scottish Bird Report*, *Raptor Round-up*, Winter programme, Winter outings, Report of Council, Conference Programme, Raffle tickets and renewal notices.

Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club. It is published 4 times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices need to be sent to the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace no later than 5 weeks before publication. The magazine acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and to disseminate information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. The views expressed in articles in *Scottish Bird News* are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication. The SOC also publishes the journal *Scottish Birds* which publishes original papers and notes on Scottish Ornithology and the *Scottish Bird Report*. For details of these publications and membership contact the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

200 Club

Winners in the second quarter of 1996 were:
April - 1st £30 D Maciver, Stornoway; 2nd £20 Miss J E Howie, Dalry; 3rd £10 D R Stewart, St Andrews
May - 1st £30 I M Darling, Edinburgh; 2nd £25 A J Sprott, Bonnyrigg; 3rd £20 Mrs B Shave, Christchurch; 4th £10 Mrs E M Smith, Edinburgh
June - 1st £30 A Tewnion, Dollar; 2nd £20 J C Jackson, Chester; 3rd £10 - Miss S M McCulloch, Edinburgh.

A very warm thank you to all members for the marvellous response to the request to renew their membership from 1 June. The SOC is always very grateful to you for this support which brings it over £1000 each year. If you would like to join now, please send me a cheque for £9, payable to SOC 200 Club and your membership will be recorded until May 1997.
Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL

Printing problems

Due to difficulties with new machinery at the printers, everything that should have appeared in italics in the June 1996 editions of *Scottish Bird News* and *Scottish Birds* appeared in ordinary type. The problem has been rectified for this and future editions.

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BIRDS

THE SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Scottish Bird News

DECEMBER 1996 No. 44
ISSN 0268-3199

SMITHSONIAN
JAN 28 1997
LIBRARIES

Edited by Stan da Prato
Assisted by Pamela Black,
Sylvia Laing and Joan Wilcox

The UK Seabird Monitoring Programme

The offshore islands and mainland cliffs of the UK, and especially Scotland, are important breeding sites for many species of North Atlantic seabirds, with a total of nearly three and a half million pairs of over 20 species breeding each year. The task of monitoring these seabird populations, and with them the health of their marine environment, is coordinated by the UK Seabird Monitoring Programme, based in Aberdeen. In this article, Kate Thompson, the programme's coordinator, outlines its aims and work, particularly in Scotland, in the hope of tempting more willing volunteers from the SOC towards the land's edge!

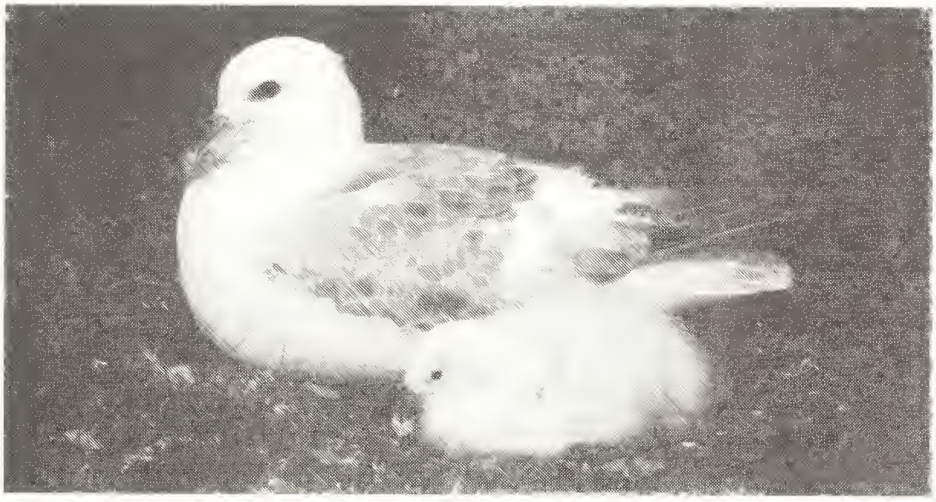
Important species

Each summer, the coasts of Britain provide nest sites for very large numbers of seabirds. These birds' real home is the rich waters around our shores, from which they gather their food, but they need safe places ashore at which to breed. Our long coastline, with its offshore islands, sand banks and cliffs, holds over 30% of the relevant biogeographic breeding populations of Manx Shearwaters, Storm Petrels, Gannets, Great Skuas, Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Guillemots, Black Guillemots and Puffins, and over 50% of the EU populations. These plus a further 8 species: Fulmar, Leach's Petrel, Shag, Arctic Skua, Common Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Kittiwake, and Razorbill. Storm Petrel, Leach's Petrel and all terns breeding in the UK are included in Annex 1 of the EU Birds Directive, while the Red Data List also includes Manx Shearwater, Gannet, Great Skua, Guillemot and Razorbill.

International responsibility

Seabirds face a variety of man made threats to the marine environment upon which they depend. These threats including over fishing, chemical pollution, including oil spills, climate change and entanglement in fixed or discarded fishing gear. On land, introduced mammalian predators, such as Rats and Mink, pose a further serious threat to breeding seabirds and their eggs or young.

Given the international conservation significance of its seabird populations, the UK government has a legal responsibility to monitor and protect seabirds breeding in Britain. Part of this duty is met by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), who, in partnership with the RSPB, Shetland Oil Terminal Environmental Advisory Group (SOTEAG) and the Seabird Group, run the UK Seabird Monitoring Programme.



Fulmar and chick *Kate Thompson JNCC*

The programme was established in 1989, following a nationwide baseline survey of coastal seabird colonies carried out between 1985 to 1987 and detailed in *The Status of Seabirds in Britain and Ireland*. I am currently employed by JNCC, in Aberdeen, as the programme coordinator. The programme's main objective is to ensure that adequate data on both breeding numbers and breeding performance of seabirds in Britain are collected to enable sound advice relevant to the conservation needs of breeding seabirds to be provided to the UK government and other organisations. In addition to their own conservation needs, seabirds can also act as useful indicators of the wider marine environment highlighting local or more widespread problems.

Monitoring

The aspects of the programme directly funded by JNCC focus particularly on species such as Fulmar, Shag, Kittiwake and Auks for which changes in breeding populations, breeding success or other parameters may provide evidence of changes in the marine environment as a whole. The most detailed monitoring is undertaken through external contracts at a number of geographically dispersed key sites. In Scotland these are the Isle of May, Fair Isle and Canna. At these sites, numbers, breeding output, adult survival and diet of a wide range of species are monitored each year. In addition, I break free from the office each summer to carry out triennial monitoring of colonies on St. Kilda, on the Grampian coast and on Orkney Mainland.

JNCC also promote monitoring of numbers and breeding success of cliff nesting species at many other colonies, with data coming from a wide variety of sources including wardens, research workers, and a large number of willing volunteers. Available data from Irish colonies are also collated by JNCC, helping to place patterns or trends for British colonies in a wider context.

Much information is also collected by the JNCC's partners in the Seabird Monitoring Programme. The RSPB takes a lead role in coordinating the monitoring of terns, skuas and petrels, in addition to monitoring the full range of seabird species found on its reserves. In Shetland, SOTEAG carries out extensive population monitoring of cliff nesting species and Black Guillemots as part of a wider scheme of biological monitoring in the islands.

National database

The collation, analysis and dissemination of the data collected is an essential part of the programme. Colony data are stored on the Seabird Colony Register, a national database of seabird colony counts. This database is continually updated, using both data routinely supplied to the Seabird Monitoring Programme and collected from other sources such as local bird reports, research papers, and survey projects commissioned by Scottish Natural Heritage, RSPB and others. The database is very widely used, with data requests being received regularly from the government conservation agencies, RSPB, research workers, and environmental consultants.

Annual report

In addition to maintaining the Seabird Colony Register, and various other central databases, an annual report is produced, which is sent to all contributors of data, as well as to the statutory conservation agencies in Scotland, England, and Wales and to various voluntary conservation bodies. Copies are also lodged with the SOC, BTO and EGI libraries for general consultation by interested ornithologists.

Key findings

Key findings highlighted in the 1995 report included the continuing problems of predation by introduced Mink at colonies in western Scotland, poor Fulmar breeding success, possibly caused by unusually hot weather in the chick rearing stage, limited recovery of Shag populations in SE Scotland and NE England from a major winter wreck in 1993-94, evidence of recovery of Shag and Black Guillemot populations in the vicinity of the *Braer* oil spill site and poor breeding success of Kittiwakes and Lesser Black-backed Gulls at some Irish Sea colonies.

Methods

Another important aspect of the Seabird Monitoring Programme is the development of common standards for the collection and analysis of seabird data. Counting seabirds and assessing their breeding performance is not as straightforward as it might first appear to the uninitiated. The most appropriate count units to adopt can be occupied nests, occupied territories or individual birds depending on the species. The timing of counts is also critical. Too early and not all pairs will have begun to breed, too late and unknown numbers of pairs may already have failed and moved away from the colony. In large colonies, or for species such as Guillemots and Razorbills where numbers of birds can fluctuate markedly over short time intervals, repeat counts of sample plots, rather than whole colony counts, are used to assess population trends.

Over many years, leading seabird workers have put much effort into the development of appropriate methods for monitoring seabird populations and productivity. Details of current recommended practices are given in the *Seabird Monitoring handbook for Britain and Ireland,* published jointly by JNCC, RSPB, ITE and the Seabird Group in 1995. More specific advice on appropriate monitoring methods for given colonies is also made freely available to fieldworkers.

Volunteers

The programme is heavily reliant upon volunteer fieldworkers, without whom it simply could not function. In Scotland, a number of volunteers already come from within the ranks of the SOC (including *SBN's* illustrious editor!), but more volunteers are always needed. Scotland holds a very high proportion of the UK's breeding seabirds, with colonies such as St. Kilda, Foula, Fair Isle, Hoy, Rum, Ailsa Craig, Hermaness, the Forth Islands, Shiants, East Caithness cliffs, Grampian cliffs and Handa each holding over 5% of the British population of one or more species.

Most of the larger colonies do receive at least limited coverage each year, but there are many smaller or inland colonies (e.g. of Common Gulls) where no information is routinely collected. Both one off counts and the results of more regular monitoring of seabird colonies are of tremendous value.

Get in touch

So, if you already have any colony counts or other seabird data which you have not previously submitted to the Seabird Monitoring Programme, or if you are interested in becoming involved, please get in touch with me.

I can provide full details of methods and copies of appropriate data collecting forms. Limited travel expenses can also be covered by the Seabird Group. Above all, seabird monitoring is fun (honest!), so if you fancy a change from those little brown jobs next summer, why not head for the coast?

KateThompson
JNCC, Dunnet House, 7 Thistle Place, Aberdeen ABIO 1UZ (Tel. 01224 655703).

Guillemots *Kate Thompson JNCC*

Conservation issues

We are again indebted to SCENES for their excellent coverage of the media which has greatly assisted us in compiling this section. SCENES address is: Strome House, North Strome, Strathcarron, Ross-shire IV54 8YJ.

Raptor Study

To coincide with the start of the Grouse shooting season, an article by Magnus Linklater in *The Times* speculated on preliminary results from the study being carried out on the Duke of Buccleuch's estate at Langholm in Dumfriesshire on the effects of birds of prey on Red Grouse. The study by the Game Conservancy Trust, SNH and the RSPB is seen as a key way of assessing the demands made by the convener of the Scottish Landowners Federation (SLF) earlier this year for a cull of raptors.

According to *The Times*, the RSPB is facing an agonising dilemma over whether to support the slaughter of hawks and harriers to protect the game birds they prey on. However, the report quoted no results from the Langholm study, merely claiming that "it is an open secret that game birds have suffered a catastrophic decline on the moor - which once had the most grouse in Britain - since gamekeepers stopped trying to control birds of prey 5 years ago". It said that other species, such as Curlews, Golden Plovers and some small songbirds, have virtually disappeared on the estate. The article also stated that figures produced by the SLF show that grouse numbers have crashed since 1977.

On the basis of this speculation, an editorial in the paper commented "The results are a terrible disappointment for the predator protectors. Rare heathland birds, such as Golden Plover and Curlew, were hunted almost to extinction by their feathered enemies. Grouse numbers on what was once one of Scotland's finest estates have fallen so steeply that they may never recover. The local economy is threatened. The Duke of Buccleuch may now feel justified in calling for an immediate curb on predators. The RSPB should look at the Langholm findings and ask whether its absolutist stand is still tenable."

A subsequent report in *The Scotsman* pointed out that all the partners in the Langholm study had agreed to keep its progress secret until the end of the 5 year project and full analysis of the results. Graham Wynne, RSPB Director of Conservation, said he had no intention of breaking this agreement although he did point out that the study would shed no light on the effects of raptors on other species since it concentrates only on grouse and their predators.

Andrew Dingwall-Fordyce, SLF vice convener, told *The Scotsman*: "From a landowner's point of view, we feel there are too many raptors, but we have accepted that we will await the proper scientific proof from Langholm, only when the study has been concluded."

Despite concerns over declines in their numbers there are about 300,000 pairs of Red Grouse in Britain compared to 600-700 pairs of Hen Harriers, the raptor most depleted by keppers on grouse moors. Ecologists have always argued that habitat quality and managemernt have a far greater effect on Red Grouse populations than predation by birds of prey.

Golden Eagle *Mike Ashley*

Persecution of birds of prey in 1995

The RSPB has published its annual report on persecution in Scotland, showing that illegal poisoning, shooting and trapping of protected species continued during 1995 at much the same level as 1994, with 157 incidents reported, compared to 170 the previous year. The 1995 report includes 15 poisoning cases 9 of which involved Buzzards. Confirmed cases of nest destruction, shooting or trapping involved 13 Buzzards, 7 Peregrines and 1 Golden Eagle, but there were 13 further probable persecution incidents involving Peregrines, and 13 involving Hen Harriers. Many cases of shooting of Hen Harriers were likely to have gone unrecorded, and this species is still severely restricted in numbers and range as a result of illegal persecution.

The dead Golden Eagle was found by a member of the public on Dava Moor in Morayshire in May. Analysis in a government laboratory confirmed that it was poisoned by Alphachlorolose. This poison may be used legally only against mice at very low concentrations.

Charles Frank

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Sheep farmers threaten White-tailed Eagles

The reintroduction scheme was set up 21 years ago and is now jointly operated by the RSPB and SNH. The occasion has been marred by complaints from sheep farmers on one Hebridean island that the eagles there have been taking livestock.

One farmer is quoted as saying "Lambs don't stand a chance, the birds are so large." Another claims the carcasses of 76 lambs were found in the nest of one pair of Sea Eagles in the past 7 years. Some farmers told the press that, unless something is done about the birds, they will shoot them.

RSPB spokesman, David Minns, said: "That would not only be illegal but probably impractical as well - I don't see them getting close enough."

The eagles were not deliberately introduced to the island, the name of which we have been requested not to publish.

The RSPB has paid thousands of pounds in compensation to the small number of farmers who have lost stock during the past 3 years. Despite paying out a total of £3,500 since 1993 and offering a further £2,500 this year, relations between the RSPB and the sheep farms appear to be deteriorating. One problem is estimating the number of lambs that have been eaten and how many of them were actually killed by eagles. The RSPB prefers to count the number of carcasses found in and around the eyrie, which suggests that the birds accounted for 20 lambs last year.

After the introduction of other carrion including Rabbits, for them to eat during the lambing season this year and based on an average price of £20 per lamb, the offer of £2,500 more than compensates for the 8 lambs that were found at the eyrie in 1996. Many of the lambs found on the nest were bound to have died of other causes and been picked up as carrion.

Footnote

Seven pairs of sea eagles reared 11 young birds this summer, 4 more than last year, and the largest number since the scheme began in 1975. Another 10 chicks from Norway were released at a secret location to reinforce the Scottish population.

White-tailed Eagle *John Love*

New Red Kite release programme in central Scotland

As part of a new RSPB/SNH Red Kite reintroduction programme in Central Scotland, 19 Red Kites were released on 1 August 1996. Over the next 3 to 4 years they hope to release up to 100 Red Kites, imported from Germany.

This follows on from the very successful release programme in northern Scotland, where 16 pairs bred this year; 15 pairs were successful and fledged 38 young. All 32 breeding adults from 1995 survived and attempted to breed in 1996 which is extraordinary and a credit to the local farmers and gamekeepers.

So far this autumn, first year Red Kites from Inverness have been seen from Mull to Kirkcudbrightshire. An untagged Kite was seen at Carlops, Midlothian. Some of the released first year birds also disperse throughout central and southern Scotland every autumn and winter.

Of the 19 Kites from central Scotland 16 visited the communal roost until the end of October 1996. But, after the first spell of bad weather on 28/29 October, 4 more dispersed to the south. Radio tracking has helped locate 3 of the 7 dispersed birds as they passed south to the west of Glasgow between Milngavie and Helensburgh, probably en route down the Ayrshire coast and beyond.

In order to monitor the wandering birds and speak to the various landowners, gamekeepers and farmers who will encounter the Kites, we rely heavily on records from birdwatchers and the general public. This year's Kites from central Scotland have 2 yellow wing tags, with a black number or letter and a colour bar at the end of each tag. All the 38 wild young which fledged in northern Scotland have a sky blue left tag and a yellow right tag. Please send all records of Red Kites, with or without tag details to: ***Lorcan O'Toole, RSPB, Unit 3.1, West of Scotland Science Park, Kelvin Campus, Glasgow G20 0SP. Tel 0141 945 5224***

Corncrakes prosper

The fortunes of the Corncrake, one of Britains's most threatened birds, are improving. After suffering a huge decline during the past 100 years, the British population has increased again for the third year running.

As *SBN* readers will know, the Corncrake is a globally endangered bird which has suffered a dramatic decline throughout Europe. Its numbers, however, are now increasing in parts of Scotland. Singing males in areas which hold 92 per cent of the British population have been counted annually since 1993 and provisional figures for 1996 show a 9% increase with 584 singing males compared with 537 in 1995. After a 4% increase in 1994 and a 16% increase in 1995, overall numbers now exceed 1988 levels when the population was estimated to be down to 574 calling males. Most of Britain's Corncrakes are in the Outer and Inner Hebrides, with growing numbers in Orkney.

Pioneering work on the RSPB reserve on Coll, now widely followed elsewhere, has shown how protecting tall vegetation, such as iris and nettles, from grazing provides the birds with vital feeding and nesting areas, and helps to conceal them from predators in the spring and early summer. Equally important has been the development of methods to improve the birds' breeding success by changing the time and method of mowing hay and silage. These conservation measures are now being implemented for the majority of Britain's Corncrakes.

For the last 4 years the RSPB, SNH and the Scottish Crofters Union have run the Corncrake Initiative, a scheme which pays crofters and farmers to cut hay or silage after 31 July and encourages them to use Corncrake friendly mowing techniques to reduce the risks to the birds from machinery. European funds have helped to pay for fieldwork, reserve management and advice provision.

Some of the areas where Corncrakes have increased are within the Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs) in the Uist machairs and the Argyll Islands west of Kintyre. Hopefully, the ESA mechanism will be enhanced so that it delivers effective Corncrake management and eventually replaces the Corncrake Initiative. ESAs must also embrace all important Corncrake areas in Scotland. At present they do not cover areas such as Orkney or Lewis and Harris.

Cairngorms strategy

The Cairngorms Partnership Board has launched its draft management strategy for the Cairngorms area, although so far only an introductory guide to the strategy has been published. The board's vision for the core montane zone is for this to be 'returned to the best near natural state possible", and it suggests that "protecting and improving the wildlife and wild landscape of the high hills should be paramount". The main proposals include:

- All important sites for nature in the high hills should be protected by national and international designations and fully funded to secure their conservation and enhancement;
- A recreation plan should be drawn up for the whole area, including ranger services;
- A review of the downhill ski areas should be undertaken to ensure consistently high standards of land management;
- Main footpaths should be repaired and no new ones constructed,
- There should be fewer Red Deer and sheep where necessary to allow the regeneration of vegetation;
- Unnecessary man made objects, including paths and tracks should be removed;
- There should be less pollution of all kinds, from litter to acid rain (although the board does not identify how it can control the latter);
- A monitoring programme and information base on the progress of management should be established.

The board urges that support should be given towards the cost of conserving nature, and suggests that the Cairngorms area should become a model of good environmental management.

With regard to the wider area, the board identifies a number of issues affecting the straths, glens, villages and towns in the area, including the lack of well paid jobs to retain the local population and the difficulty which local people face in buying houses. On the natural environment, it comments: "Continuity of good land management is essential for the long term protection of the natural environment. This raises issues of land ownership and land tenure, and the use of taxpayers' money to subsidise management practices that are damaging to the landscape and wildlife." On landscape, it comments on the "gradual encroachment on the countryside by tracks, pylons, deer fences, radio masts and so on, which are obtrusive in countryside", but make no reference to plans for a funicular railway on Cairn Gorm.

The board's vision for this area states "In all the glens and straths around the edge of the Cairngorms massif, the Mounth, and other high hills, the natural environment should be better protected and enhanced, and residents should believe that they have a more secure future. Ways need to be found to protect the area's wildlife and landscape, whilst creating jobs and improving the daily lives of its residents". To this end it suggests a range of proposals:

- Proper protection for important wildlife sites and the creation of links between them;
- Establishment of a national centre for environmental management and education;
- The formation of a Forest of Spey and a Deeside Forest;
- Reduction of Red Deer and Rabbit numbers in some areas, and better management of sheep, to allow natural regeneration of trees, particularly within the Forest of Spey and the Deeside Forest;
- Proper financial and advisory support to maintain traditional farm and moorland landscapes;
- More effective management of rivers, lochs, wetlands and ground water;
- Visitor management plans for all popular and easily accessible hill areas, such as Loch Muick and Lochnagar, which will encourage walking rather than driving to the hills.

Copies of the **Managing the Cairngorms; an introductory guide to the Cairngorms Partnership draft management strategy** are available free from *Cairngorms Partnership, Freepost, Licence no SCO586, Grantown on Spey, Inverness-shire PH26 3BR* A copy is in the Waterston Library. Comments should be sent to the above address before the end of December.

Funicular alternative

Conservation groups opposed to building a railway high on Cairn Gorm have launched an alternative proposal. They suggest a high speed gondola running from Glenmore over the forest into Coire Cas ie not taking people so high up the mountain. They also accept the need to upgrade ski lifts. Local politicians have already stated that they do not think the gondola is a realistic alternative. Interestingly, an opinion poll carried out by Market Research Scotland, who questioned a sample of 1,000+ people throughout Scotland, found that only 7% wanted a visitor centre near Cairn Gorm summit while 60% preferred it to be at the edge of the mountain.

There are increasing doubts over the finances of the funicular which is dependent on over £10 million of public money. The recent resignation of a leading figure from the Cairngorm Chairlift Company has fuelled speculation that all is not well with the project.

Criticisms of RSPB

Several northern newspapers have reported criticism of the RSPB during a hearing of the Scottish National Party's Scottish Land Commission in Inverness. In evidence to the committee the RSPB's reserves manager for northern Scotland, Peter Mayhew, said the society's reserves in the Highlands and Islands totalled some 25,000 hectares, but he admitted that the RSPB had no generic policies on the management of people on its land. He said "We acquire land to control the ecology and the environment, and that must take priority, but it is also of great importance that we work well with local communities. Conservation organisations are evolving their thinking on these issues."

A cross country skier

Uist hide criticism

Both *The Scotsman* and *The Herald* reported criticisms by a North Uist councillor of plans by the RSPB to build a hide on its Balranald reserve on the island about 100m from the Kilmuir Cemetery, to allow visitors to watch birds on Loch nam Feithean. Councillor Maclean stated that his reaction, and that of local people was "that we have never heard of such unbridled arrogance as to the order of priorities that you seem to have, ie disturbing birds on the loch is more important than respect for the dead." A letter to *The Scotsman,* signed by partners in the Balranald Project, including Western Isles Enterprise, Western Isles Council and the Western Isles Tourist Board, as well as the RSPB and SNH, said that the joint £80,000 project to upgrade interpretation facilities, toilets and birdwatching facilities at Balranald would offer a much improved experience for visitors and the local community. It pointed out that "The suggestion that the hide would be foisted by the RSPB on the local community could not be further from the truth. Initial consultation has taken place with the local minister, the Church of Scotland in Edinburgh, local crofters and the local community council, and we can assure your readers that no hide will be built unless it has the support of the local community."

Ospreys for England

Much media coverage, not all of it accurate, has been given to the project whereby Osprey chicks from nests in Scotland are to be moved to artificial nests at Rutland Water, a large reservoir now managed by Anglian Water. We understand that 8 young Ospreys were moved this year and the project involves more going south for the next 4 years. Roy Dennis, who has, of course, many years experience with Scottish Ospreys, has been involved in the project. Only one chick is removed from a nest and only if that nest contains 3 young.

Even so, the project has attracted some controversy. Ospreys are migratory and regularly occur at Rutland Water and other water bodies in England. The Scottish population has built up naturally without reintroduction by humans, unlike the White-tailed Eagle and Red Kite. Not everyone agrees with the manager of Rutland Water that it could take over a century for Ospreys to recolonise southern England without direct human assistance. We understand funding for the project has come from Anglian Water and National Panisonic, who supplied monitoring equipment, and not English Nature. We also understand that there was considerable discussion within SNH before permission was given to remove the chicks. Fortunately the Rutland Water anglers seem to be happy enough about sharing their reservoir with fish eating birds, which is not always the case in parts of Scotland.

Ayrshire trap fine

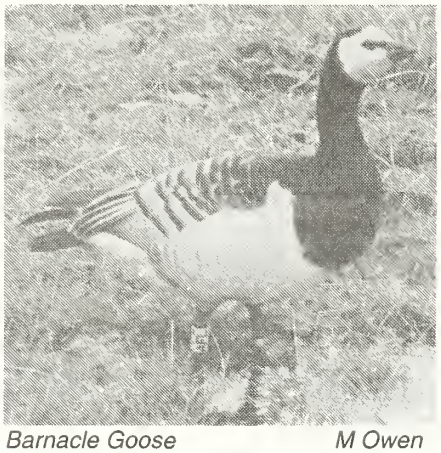
A game keeper on Glenapp Estate, Ballantrae, Ayrshire was fined £300 at Ayr Sheriff Court after pleading guilty to possessing 3 illegal bird traps. The court accepted his plea of not guilty to baiting one of the traps with a live pigeon. The estate head keeper was cleared of charges relating to the possession of Alphachloralose poison, after the court heard that there was insufficient evidence to support the case.

Eagle film fine

Two men from Birmingham were fined £1,750 at Wick Sheriff Court after admitting that they had intentionally disturbed a Golden Eagle at its nest. Police found them in Caithness last summer with camcorder footage of an eyrie in Galloway, showing the men climbing up to the nest and filming an adult eagle in flight.

Solway goose licence

The Scottish Office and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust have reached an out of court settlement, after WWT successfully petitioned for a judicial review of the Scottish Office decision to issue a licence to Daniel Quinn, of Powhillon Farm on the Solway, to shoot a limited number of Barnacle Geese, which he claimed were damaging crops. The WWT had earlier received legal opinion that the granting of the licence was unlawful under the terms of the EU Birds Directive. In its news release, the WWT states "The terms of the settlement are a vindication of WWT's position and, in agreeing to pay WWT's legal costs, the Scottish Office has accepted that the issue of the licence was not appropriate."



Barnacle Goose *M Owen*

WWT has argued that farmers on the Solway, whose land is used by Barnacle Geese, should join the goose management scheme under which SNH pays them to tolerate the birds on their fields. Most affected farmers already take advantage of these payments, but Mr Quinn has argued that they are inadequate. The settlement has established a significant predicement for future licence applications. The Scottish Office has recognised that the requirements of the EU Birds Directive must be taken into account when applications for licences to shoot protected species in Special Protection Areas are being considered. The Scottish Office has also, in effect, accepted that SNH's goose management scheme is an alternative to shooting in situations on the Solway where crop damage by Barnacle Geese is claimed.

However, Mr Quinn seems determined not to join the SNH scheme. He has also been quoted in the press as saying that Scots law allows a farmer to shoot geese on his land. Meanwhile WWT has given him notice to quit his tenancy. Quinn, who has not paid rent since 1994, says he will not go.

Beaver reintroduction

An SNH commissioned feasibility study, by Andrew Kitchener of the National Museum of Scotland and Jim Conroy of the institute of Terrestrial Ecology, into the proposed reintroduction of the European Beaver into Scotland is nearing completion. It seems that the Scottish Office is soon likely to be asked for a licence to reintroduce about 30 Beavers. Dr Kitchener favours a pilot scheme at a single site, although no site has yet been chosen. Meanwhile, a compilation of reports has been published by the group which visited the Parc Naturel Régional d'Armorique in Brittany to study the effects of the reintroduction of the Beaver there in the late 1960s. This includes a report to the Atlantic Salmon Trust by Peter Jones of Edinburgh University on the possible impact of the Beaver on freshwater salmon fisheries. The report concludes: "The presence of Beavers in the Parc d'Armorique is considered beneficial..., especially for the trout fishery, and their effect on the hydrology of the river and associated flood meadows helps maintain the biodiversity of other wildlife. Possible negative effects, such as tree damage or damage to riverbanks, are considered trivial. The Parc is not a suitable place to investigate the possible impacts of the European Beavers on Atlantic salmon, because the 2 species do not occur together there. A survey of the literature, and the experience of members of the study group, suggest that Beaver dams are no obstacle to the movements of migratory fish nor are they likely to affect Salmon spawning grounds."

Several press reports drew attention to public opinion surveys which show that reintroduction of Beavers would be generally acceptable but that many Scots, especially in rural areas, are less happy about proposals to release Wolves into the Highlands. A higher proportion of people in the Glen Afric area, which has been suggested as a suitable site, were critical of the Wolf proposal than in Scotland as a whole.

Beaver escape

Patrick Telfer-Smollet has confirmed that at least 2 Canadian Beavers which escaped from his collection are still at large near Loch Lomond and have bred in the wild, despite the death or recovery of other escapees.

The escaped pair burrowed deep into a riverbank at a site which Mr Telfer-Smollet is keeping secret to protect the animals, which he hopes to recapture.

Scotland's mountains

The Mountain Chapter resulting from the Earth Summit at Rio in 1992 summarised the main considerations for mountain development. The European Intergovernmental Consultation on Sustainable Mountain Development was held in Scotland in April 1996. To coincide with this meeting Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Link, the liaison body of 30 non governmental countryside organisations in Scotland which includes the SOC, commissioned a report on sustainable development in the Scottish hills.

Mountains on the edge

What and where are Scotland's mountains? The highest point in Scotland is Ben Nevis at 1344metres. By European standards it could be argued that Scotland does not have any mountains; based on altitudinal criteria we have only uplands. That is one reason why Scottish outdoor people often talk of the hill ground rather than mountains.

Due to its oceanic climate, Scotland's uplands contain ecological zones which are typical of mountain regions in many parts of Europe. The tree line in Scotland is 700 to 800m, and as low as 200m in the north and west. This is extremely low compared with other European countries and compares with 2,600m in the Alps and 1,200m in central Norway. Scotland's montane zone includes all land above the tree line and embraces moss and lichen heaths, snowbeds, blanket bog and dwarf shrubs. Approximately 12% of Scotland's land surface is montane.

The montane zone cannot alone define the extent of mountain country which includes the lower slopes of the mountains and the glens which run through them. Scotland's mountains in many areas arise straight out of the sea. Clearly altitude alone is a poor way of defining Scotland's mountain country. An additional submontane zone stretches from the upper limits of cultivation up to the tree line. Scotland's hill country covers over 70% of the land.

Origins

Scotland's mountains are old. Lewisian gneiss, which forms the base of the mountains in the Outer Hebrides, was formed 2,500 million years ago and is among the oldest rocks in the world. Scotland's mountains were uplifted in the Caledonian mountain building period 450 million years ago. Since then the landscape has evolved through weathering and erosion, continental drift, volcanic eruptions and glaciation. The mixture of mountain forms in Scotland, from the sharp volcanic peaks of the Cuillins in Skye to the eroded plateaux of the Cairngorms, is due to this long and varied history. Scotland's mountains were finally subjected to glaciation. Huge ice sheets advanced and receded until the end of the last ice age 10,000 years ago.

Maritime influences

Scotland has an oceanic climate characterised by high precipitation (over 2,500mm in the western hills) and strong winds (over 160km/hour is common on the tops). Weather patterns are highly variable and there is a marked variation over short distances, both across the country and altitudinally. The growing season for plants is relatively short. The lapse rate (average temperature decrease with height) is relatively steep, at 1°C for every 150m. When combined with frequent high wind speeds, this results in a sub arctic environment.

People in the hills

After the last ice age ended, hunters arrived and spread across the country. Since then, humans have lived around the mountains and adapted the vegetation extensively. What many people regard as a natural environment is, in reality, highly modified. The long association between people and the Scottish uplands has produced an interesting cultural history, but has also had detrimental effects on the environment, notably large scale deforestation.

Patterns of occupation have changed markedly over time. Populations in the Highlands peaked at the end of the 18th century, when the agricultural economy was dependent on sheep, cattle and goats together with some arable crops. Environmentally, this economy was probably sustainable since stockir.g levels were limited by the availability of winter feed. In addition, cattle, which cause much less deterioration to the pasture quality of hill country than sheep, were more widely reared. Extensive and prolonged sheep grazing is widely regarded as having contributed to the decline in the productivity of hill grazings, and to the loss and deterioration of upland habitats, such as heather moorland.

Social change

Economic and political change in the 19th century resulted in massive emigration and enforced clearance by the aristocracy and a new class of wealthy landowners who replaced subsistence agriculture with sheep ranching. A later wave of change came in the mid to late 19th century, when a new wealthy elite from the cities of Scotland and England bought large areas of mountain country and transformed them into hunting reserves for Red Deer and Red Grouse. Vast sums were spent by mainly absentee owners on roads, tracks, and buildings. The Highlands were transformed economically, politically and

Ptarmigan

Mike Ashley

Dotterel *John Chapman*

culturally. Independence was replaced by dependence on the wider British economy.

The ownership of the Highlands today is dominated by private hunting estates. Agriculture is still important and plantation forestry has expanded. However, Scotland's hills are sparsely populated in comparison with other countries in Europe. The Highland Council area, which covers a third of Scotland, has a population density of only 8 persons per km^2. This compares with 26 persons per km^2 on similar land in Norway.

The Clearances resulted in a densely populated western seaboard but a largely empty interior. Land reform in 1886 provided protection for crofters in the north and west of Scotland, but not in the east or further south. Depopulation has been a continuing trend for most of the 20th century and has only recently begun to reverse in some areas, due mainly to immigration from outside the Highlands. The few people who still live in mountain areas continue to make a living from agriculture, forestry, hunting and tourism.

The condition of Scotland's mountains

Objective scientific information on the overall condition of Scotland's uplands is difficult to obtain due to the lack of consistent monitoring. Information on the condition of particular species and habitats is more readily available.

Indigenous woodland now covers only 2% of Scotland. There have been extensive changes to upland vegetation due to management. The extensive heather moorland of the eastern Highlands is a good example of vegetation modified by management, but still valuable ecologically and rare internationally. Impacts include loss of important habitats through afforestation, burning and overgrazing together with more localised impacts such as erosion, trampling, bulldozed tracks and ski development.

With an oceanic climate and relatively easy human access, effects which in other mountain regions would have less impact tend to be greater in the Scottish hills. Soil erosion caused by overgrazing is widespread and exacerbated by high precipitation, short growing seasons and the absence of stabilising shrubby vegetation above the tree line.

Scotland's mountains and their wildlife

Scotland's mountain vegetation is special due to its diversity and the extent of globally rare and localised species and communities. Ombrotrophic bogs, and blanket bog in particular, are rare globally and Scotland's peatlands have affinities with those as far away as Kamchatka and Tierra del Fuego. Montane plant communities with arctic affinities survive on the great plateaux of the Cairngorms and are southern and oceanic outliers of arctic alpine fellfield and mountain tundra found as far apart as Norway, Greenland and the Canadian Arctic. Other distinctive plant communities include *Rhacomitruim* heaths, an oceanic community absent from continental European mountains.

It is the combination of species that provides much of the botanical interest in Scotland's uplands. Arctic plants at the southern edge of their distribution are found growing alongside alpine plants which are widespread at lower elevations than on the continent.

Birds have been well studied in the Scottish uplands and the mixture of species breeding in the Scottish mountains is probably greater than anywhere else in Europe. The montane zone has 23 species of breeding birds of which 3 are exclusive to it: Ptarmigan, Dotterel and Snow Bunting. Many other important species, such as Golden Eagle, Peregrine and Golden Plover depend on the wider mountain country, and many specialist species such as Scottish Crossbill are found in associated habitats such as pinewoods. This make the Scottish Highlands one of the most important areas in the UK for birds. Other animals of the montane regions include 12 mammals and 2000 to 3000 of the larger invertebrates.

Landscape and recreation

The special nature of Scotland's mountain landscapes arises from the scale of the mountains and their close association with lochs, moors, glens and the sea. The frequently changing weather and strong seasonality also play an important role. A further unique quality of Scottish mountain country is its relative openness - a consequence of widespread deforestation - which provide both extensive views and a rich variety of colours and textures.

Scotland's mountains provide a wide range of recreational opportunities and a keen walker can climb virtually any of them in a day trip from the main cities. The highly variable climate combined with the difficult terrain provides a challenge to the most experienced mountaineers and skiers. Scotland's mountains cater for a wide range of skill levels and can also be enjoyed all year, with the contrast between summer and winter walking and climbing contributing much to the enjoyment of mountaineering.

The 1980s saw a great increase in mountain walking which is now one of the most popular recreational activities in Scotland. The growth in skiing, as well as newer activities such as mountain biking, also affects the hills.

Cultural influences

In contrast to other mountain regions of Europe, which still retain a broad pattern of small farms and forestry and where local populations maintain strong cultural values, Scotland's mountains have increasingly become an arena for competing cultures.

Gaelic culture has been severely eroded. Although a revival of Gaelic culture is under way in the west, where crofting survives, areas further south and east, such as Deeside and Strathspey, have lost almost all of their former Gaelic culture. The 19th century development of hunting

estates brought a different set of values, which viewed the mountains as areas for exclusive private enjoyment for a few months of the year. More recently, another dimension has been added by the upsurge in popular mountain recreation. Scotland's mountains have come to inspire pride in Scots, and others, who see the mountains as an element in their sense of Scottish identity.

People living in Scotland's uplands have their own strong aspirations for employment and economic development to allow them to sustain their local communities and culture. Private ownership, together with inadequate forms of local democracy, have left many communities alienated from discussions about mountain conservation.

What are Scotland's mountains for?

Recently it has been recognised that informal recreational activity is of huge economic importance. A recent survey identified hill walking as worth £200 million per year to the Highlands and Islands. Recreation is now the major land use over the uplands of Scotland. This was predicted as early as 1964 by Frank Fraser Darling, in response to the decision of the UK government in the late 1940s not to establish national parks in Scotland. Recreation has still to enjoy the kind of priority in land use planning and government policy that it deserves.

A feature of the kinds of impacts which continue to cause problems in Scotland's uplands is that a high proportion of them have been the direct result of financial subsidies and government land use policies. This is particularly true with afforestation and agriculture, though other land uses have also caused problems.

One of the problems we face is in not knowing enough about the effect of recreational use of Scotland's mountains since research is virtually non existent in comparison to the resources committed to agriculture and forestry. Its impacts are also often overstated in comparison with those land uses. Impacts on mountain plant communites from outdoor recreation are probably less than those from afforestation and overgrazing.

One impact which has been documented is that of tracks and paths. However, no national policy guidance exists for the identification and management of important areas of wild land. Even the right of public access remains unresolved. Voluntary concordats between landowners and recreation groups have been agreed which provide some basis for future planning. Scotland does not have the kind of legal protection of universal public access to uncultivated land enjoyed by Scandinavian countries.

Golden Eagle *Keith Brockie*

The need for effective conservation

Scotland's mountains remain poorly protected by landscape designations such as National Scenic Areas, which have been found to be largely ineffective. Even the new EU designation, Special Areas of Conservation, has been restricted to Sites of Special Scientific Interest by the UK government. Some of the most important mountain country continues to be traded in the international land market with uncertainty renewed every time an estate is sold.

The present government places too much reliance on the "voluntary principle". It is unusual in Europe for so much reliance to be placed on such a principle. Government policies have been so ineffective that voluntary conservation bodies have had to engage in political campaigns and then buy land to protect wildlife habitats or safeguard outstanding scenery.

By 1995 conservation bodies in total owned over 133,500ha of land. Conservation bodies are also attempting to overcome suspicion and distrust in local communities. Much work remains to be done in this field which, perhaps more than anything else, provides the greatest challenge in mountain conservation. Experience from other parts of the world demonstrates that meaningful participation by local people is vital to success. However, conservation bodies can only do so much. The conspicuous failure at act has been at government level.

An agenda for Scotland's uplands

Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Link propose that this should be based on the following criteria:

1 Stronger controls over land use and better land use integration.
2 Maximum protection for the most valuable mountain areas.
3 Expansion of public ownership of the most valuable mountain country.
4 Enhanced participation by and benefits to mountain communities.
5 Strategic planning for outdoor recreation.
6 Commitment to restore mountain ecosystems.
7 Improved research and monitoring of mountain areas.
8 International collaboration in montane conservation.

This article is been based on Scotland's Mountains an Agenda for Sustainable Development, prepared by Andy Wightman for the Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Link. Copies of the report can be obtained from SWCL, PO Box 64, Perth PH2 0TF at a cost of £4.00. A copy is in the Library

Hostility to conservation

Attempts to buy Glen Feshie estate by a consortium of conservation organisations were undermined when the National Heritage Memorial Fund refused to put money into the purchase on the grounds that the Will Woodlands Trust was prepared to buy the estate and manage it sympathetically. So far, sympathetic management has led to the resignation of the Red Deer Commission chairman and the head of WWF in Scotland from the advisory group since they doubt whether the Trust is serious about reducing Deer numbers and other conservation policies.

Further evidence of hostility to conservation bodies extending their land holdings in the area comes from press reports that Gaick estate would be sold to shooting interests in preference to any sort of conservation offer, even if that meant accepting a lower price!

National Parks on the horizon?

At the recent World Conservation Congress in Canada, it emerged that the Scottish Office is to include the possibility of setting up National Parks in Scotland as part of a review of land designations. Up till now, National Parks have been ruled out by government ministers responsible for Scotland.

Speyside Oystercatchers

The last 2 issues of *Scottish Bird News* carried a request for information on sightings of yellow Oystercatchers. This followed a catch made by the Highland Ringing Group at Newtonmore on 29 March, when 122 out of a flock of 320 Oystercatchers were trapped and given a temporary yellow dye mark on the wing bars and rump.

Flocks of Oystercatchers roosting beside rivers are a feature of early spring in the Highlands, and one such flock develops on the banks of the Spey on the north side of Newtonmore from mid February each year until the birds start to disperse in early April. It has been known for some time (R L Swann, 1985, *Ringing and Migration* 6:55-59) that the Oystercatchers which form these inland pre-breeding flocks and nest in the Highlands away from the coast, move down to the Irish Sea coasts for the winter. The Newtonmore flock appeared to be no exception. All of the birds caught were, as expected, at least 3 years old and old enough to breed, so that the flock could fairly be regarded as a pre breeding gathering. Of the 122 caught no less than 7 were already carrying rings; 5 of these had been ringed in winter on the Irish Sea coast, while 2 had been ringed as chicks in the Highlands. After our appeals in *SBN, BTO News* and the *Badenoch and Strathspey Courier*, a total of 41 (34%) of the Oystercatchers marked were reported back to us.

Marking appeared to have no adverse affect on the birds. Although the colour was vivid when the birds were in flight it was much less noticeable on the ground. One pair, the male marked, the female not, were seen mating the day after the catch. One dyed bird was taken by a Peregrine at Newtonmore later in the breeding season but this is not unusual and there was no evidence that the marking increased vulnerability to predators.

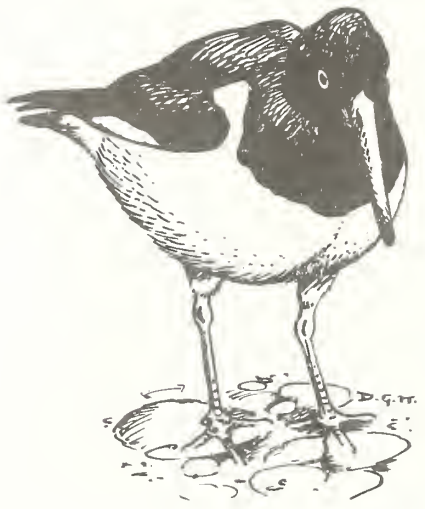
Of the 40 birds reported during the breeding season, 27 (67%) were seen in the 10 km square at Newtonmore, with a further 3 in the adjacent square so that 75% of the marked birds bred locally. Evidence that the flock was not solely composed of local breeders came within days when a yellow Oystercatcher was seen at Loch Fleet. The final distribution of breeding Oystercatchers from the Newtonmore flock, as revealed by these marked birds, stretched from Loch Fleet in the north to Strathardle to the south east, with another in Strath Ruasdale. Perhaps the most reported individual was one which chose to nest beside the A9 at Dalmagarry Farm, south of Moy, surprising passing twitchers at regular intervals through the summer with its exotic fly-bys. Although the majority of the Newtonmore flock was composed of birds which bred locally, at least 25% were birds which dispersed to breed elsewhere in the Highlands, with the furthest up to 100 km away.

By July most of the birds were well into their moult and the dye had become very indistinct. In spite of this, an observant SOC member found a yellow bird in a flock of Oystercatchers at Laggan Bay on Islay on the 27 July. What is really interesting about this, apart from the indication it gives us about the route the birds take back to their wintering area, is that it reveals just how short a time they spend in the Highlands. The first Oystercatchers arrive back in Strathspey in late February, with the pre breeding flocks building to a peak at the end of March. Egg laying starts in early April, and most of the birds start to depart again in July.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to John Drysdale for giving us permission to catch Oystercatchers at Nuide Farm, Newtonmore. Highland Ringing Group members, Brian Etheridge, Ann French, Bill Taylor, Gemma and Holly Insley, Shona Mackay, Nigel and Euan Buxton all endured a cold, snowy March evening to catch and process these Oystercatchers. We thank all the SOC members who reported their sightings of the marked birds and made this study successful.

Hugh Insley and Pat French



Oystercatcher *David Mitchell*

Machair wader declines

The Uist machairs are of international importance for breeding waders, and hold nearly one third of the UK breeding populations of Dunlins and Ringed Plovers. In 1995, routine monitoring of these populations by RSPB revealed declines of around 50% in the number of Dunlins, Ringed Plovers, Redshanks and Snipe since the previous full WSG/NCC survey in 1983. In contrast, Lapwing and Oystercatcher numbers had remained largely unchanged.

An RSPB research project is now investigating the causes of these declines. Fieldwork in 1996 indicates that egg losses lie at the root of the problem. Comparison with nest survival figures from the mid 1980s, when breeding success was good, reveals startling changes. For example, Dunlin nest survival has declined from 72% to 10%, Redshank from 52% to 12% and Ringed Plover from 25% to 7%. Clearly, with so few pairs hatching chicks, overall production is insufficient to maintain these species' populations. Conversely, for Lapwing and Oystercatcher, the 2 species not showing large population declines, nest survival rates in 1996 were good (54% and 50% respectively) and their productivity was probably adequate. Once chicks hatched, no differences were apparent in their survival to fledging in 1996 compared to the mid 1980s.

Almost all egg losses this year appeared to be due to Common Gulls and Hedgehogs. In the mid 1980s Common Gulls were the only important egg predator but it is not known whether the gulls are more numerous today. Hedgehogs were released on South Uist in the mid 1970s but were neither seen nor suspected of taking eggs during wader studies in the mid 1980s on the same sites worked this year. Now, however, they are abundant over most of the breeding wader habitat.

Many questions remain. Will the wader declines continue? Was the 1996 breeding season typical of recent years? How does changing land management affect wader breeding success and predator numbers? Is wader productivity higher in areas with fewer predators? Further RSPB research work will be addressing these issues next year with a view to implementing conservation measures as soon as possible.

Digger Jackson, RSPB

Ringed Plovers *David Mitchell*

Farmland waders in Scotland

In 1992 and 1993 the SOC and RSPB jointly coordinated a survey of breeding waders on farmland in Scotland (the results are published in the December issue of *Scottish Birds*). Findings were rather surprising, with considerably more Curlews and Oystercatchers than anticipated. In addition substantial populations of Lapwings, Snipe and, to a lesser extent, Redshanks were recorded. We were surprised at the importance of the wider Scottish countryside for breeding waders. The majority of waders were thinly distributed across Scottish farmland, not concentrated on known key areas such as the Northern and Western Isles, although densities in these areas are particularly high.

We were unable in 1992-93 to obtain much information on wader populations from previous surveys. This meant that we were unable to determine whether wader populations on farmland in Scotland were changing at rates similar to wader populations elsewhere in the UK. The information that we did collect for mainland Scotland gave a rather mixed picture with some sites holding stable, or increasing populations, others showing substantial declines. Anecdotal evidence, from farmers and birdwatchers alike, suggest that populations of Lapwings and Redshanks, in particular, are declining.

In order to remedy this lack of information about trends in wader populations on farmland in Scotland we have decided to repeat the 1992-93 survey in 1997-98. Those of you who remember the first survey will recall that this means that RSPB will employ a number of fieldworkers to collect information on wader numbers on a sample of randomly selected squares. Surveys of areas identified as key sites were surveyed previously by volunteers, and we hope that this will be possible again in 1997. **If you are interested in getting involved in this project , please contact me through Sylvia at the SOC.**

MarkO'Brien
RSPB

Depths to which auks dive

With reference to the note on a deep diving Guillemot in the September *SBN*, I draw attention to a paper published in 1985 by John Piatt and David Nettleship (*Auk* 102:293-297). This gave diving depths from bottom set fishing nets off Newfoundland. The authors concluded that Razorbills can dive to depths of at least 120 m. This was based on a small sample size, but Guillemots were much commoner in the area and were found regularly to dive to 180 m which was the depth of the sea bottom. The authors concluded that they may dive to even greater depths. Puffins, however, were not recorded below 60 m and Black Guillemots not below 50 m. This still summarises the state of play with depth records. For those who prefer non metric, Guillemots can dive to at least 590 ft, a remarkable performance. It may also be worth noting that Guillemots exhale before diving, like most diving organisms, thus there is very little air to squeeze out of their bodies as they go down.

Mark Tasker

The Arisaig Hotel

Family run hotel on Arisaig Bay looking over to the island of Eigg. Arisaig provides access to both moorland and coastline offering a great variety of habitats to naturalists. There are boat trips from the harbour opposite the hotel out to the Small Isles - Eigg, Muck and Rum with frequent sightings of whales and dolphins. Accessible by train Arisaig is an ideal location for a holiday that combines seashore, mountains and boat trips.

For more information contact Mr & Mrs Ross, Arisaig Hotel, Arisaig, Inverness-shire PH39 4NH. Tel 01687 450210 Fax 01687 450310

Ringed Plovers by Loch Tay

On 27 March 1996, at dusk, I went to the shore of Loch Tay, by Killin, to see if there were any signs of the arrival of spring waders. In a break in the north easterly winds a flock of 20 Peewits circled round and settled in a field, followed by 50 Curlews which settled nearby. As the light was fading, a small flock of 5 Ringed Plovers flew along the shore and settled on a sand bank.

In the few weeks following, the weather reverted to winter, with fresh snow, frost and north easterly winds. Most of the waders departed. At the end of April and during May, several individual Ringed Plovers were seen on the shore line, but no sign of a breeding pair.

I decided to look at the Breachlaich Quarry to the south of Loch Tay on 8 June to find one pair in the Quarry and one pair just outside on stony ground. Both pairs gave anxiety calls, suggesting nesting activity. On 24 June, I visited the quarry again to find it full of cattle. One pair of plovers were running round, calling anxiously. No young were seen; any eggs would probably be trampled on by the cattle, though possibly young might escape. By 1 July, the cattle had gone and there was no sign of the plovers. Subsequently one Ringed Plover was seen on the loch shore on 7 July and 3 on 15 July; all were adults.

Pat W Sandeman

Stewartry Branch celebrations

As every member of the SOC knows, this is the 60th anniversary of the Club. Equally every member of the Stewartry Branch knows that this is our 20th anniversary. The members of the branch decided that this double event should not pass without suitable commemoration. It was agreed that the celebration should be in 2 parts: firstly a bird watching trip to Mallorca at the time of the spring migration; and secondly a special meeting, which would be the first of the new session in the autumn.

Dealing with the second event first (this is not ***Irish Bird News***, eds), this special meeting took place in the Ken Bridge Hotel on Thursday, 19 September - in fact, 20 years and 3 days since the first branch meeting on Thursday, 16 September 1976. In preparation for this get together, our indefatigable secretary, Joan Howie, spent months in active preparation. The numbers present reached the satisfying total of 80, one for each year of the club and branch, albeit this total includes the very welcome presence of 4 young children. Three generations of the Halliday family were present, including their 6 week old grandson.

To start proceedings the Chairman welcomed everybody, especially the guests, and in particular Alastair Peirse-Duncombe, who, in his capacity as Club Secretary had launched the Branch by officiating at the first meeting. All then enjoyed a splendid buffet and 3 young ladies, Zoe Langford and Clare and Leigh Rollie, helped to cut the special birthday cake, brought down to us from Perth by Sylvia Laing. On this cake were inscribed dates, titles and the Club logo in use when the Club was formed.

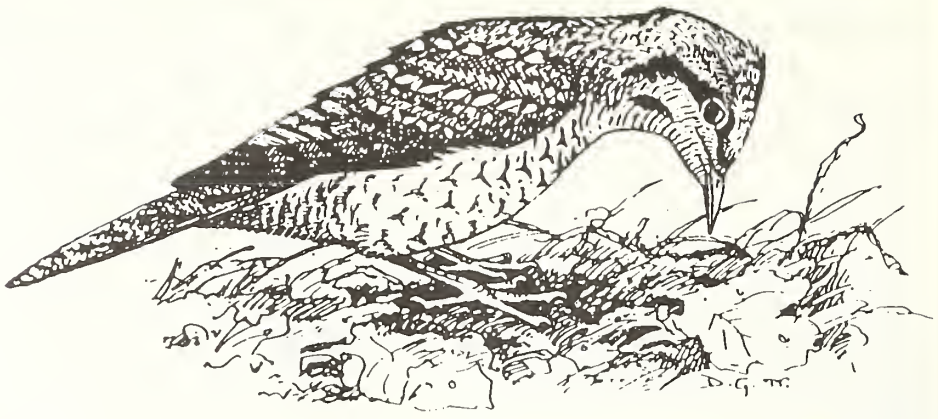
The formal part of the evening took the form of a series of presentations. In explanation of the first of these, the Chairman said that the branch finances were in very good health, despite the purchase of a new large screen and a new projector. Various people had taken part in fund raising but the healthy balance was largely due to the efforts of Ian Balfour-Paul, who for quite some time has been making and marketing nest boxes. Ian was presented with a bottle of what we understand to be his favourite tipple.

The central event of the evening was a presentation to Donald Watson. It was appropriate that Eilidh Renwick, who, as Eilidh Halliday, was the youngest member when the branch was formed, should make this presentation. In responding, Donald gave us a fascinating insight into the preparations for, and the early days of, the club. Joan Howie had earlier in the year researched the club's formation and history, and written an excellent account of it all. Now Donald told us about the pre club era, recalling people, places and happenings not recorded and so, of course, not included in Joan's article. Donald was touched to realise that the goblet he received was engraved, not just with initials and date but, like the cake, also with the first club logo which Donald himself had drawn. Bryan Nelson then presented Joan Watson with a fine Hebe for her garden.

The Chairman then thanked the secretary and treasurer of the branch, Joan Howie, for her hard work, effort and imagination. He asked her to accept a delicate model of Blue Tit on a small piece of coconut. As this was a celebration of 20 years of the branch's existence it was proper that the person responsible for starting the branch, and the chairman for the first 10 years, Helen Halliday, should be acknowledged. This presentation was made by Lady Henderson and took the form of a book about butterflies. In due course Donald Watson was able to propose the toast of the SOC, which effectively closed the evening.

The trip to Mallorca took place from 23 April to 7 May and was based in Puerto Pollensa in the north of the island, a total of 12 people being involved. Puerto Pollensa is a delightful place and is ideally situated for bird watching. Some of the best sites in Mallorca are within easy walking distance and could be visited in comfort before breakfast.

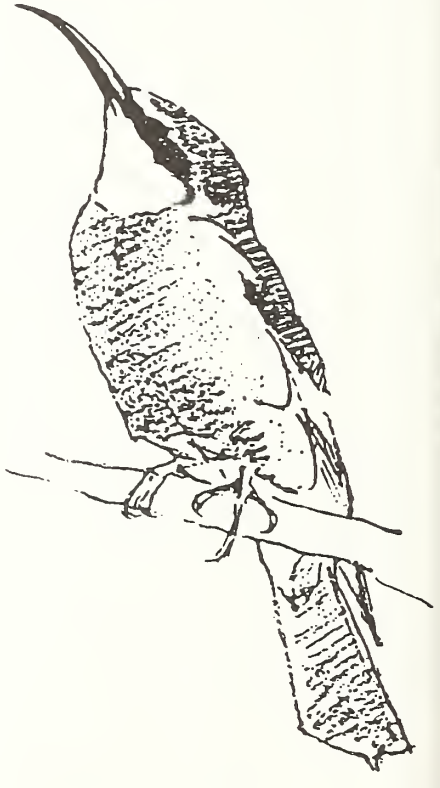
Events on the first day augured well for the rest of the trip. Red Kites, Peregrines, Lesser Kestrels and Pallid Swifts were seen from the coach taking us to our hotel. We notched up a total of 117 species for the trip.



Wryneck *David Mitchell*

It is pleasant now to recall little vignettes: Black Vultures waiting on cliff tops for thermals and then soaring effortlessly, a diminutive Subalpine Warbler repeatedly changing places with a Redstart, Bee-eaters busy in an apiary glade, Ortolan Buntings among the earth clods of an olive grove, a Wryneck in a suburban garden, Hoopoes, Audouin's Gulls almost at our doorstep on the beach. An exhausted Pratincole which refused to move and display the underwing colour patch eventually proved to be a Collared. The list could go on and on, sufficient to say that we all enjoyed a marvellous and exciting trip.

Ronan Gardner



Bee-eater *John Busby*

Bluethroats and the Flying Dutchman

The SOC Ayrshire branch visited Flevoland from 24-27 May 1996. In southern Flevoland, where we started, approximately half the land is agricultural, one quarter reserved for development and the remaining 25% is intended for recreation and conservation, including extensive woodlands as well as waterways, millraces, dikes and roads. Our main birding area was Oostvaardersplassen. Among the first species seen were many Marsh Harriers, Nightingales and 2 of our party were convinced they had seen Red breasted Flycatcher. Hundreds of Cormorants maintained formations overhead to and from their roosting and breeding areas deep in the reserve. We heard and saw many warblers, including Blackcap, Icterine, Reed, Marsh, Sedge and Savi's. Soon Bluethroat was seen. "They are very common", said a Dutch birder we met later. Common or not, we found them exciting to watch. On reaching the water we were saddened to see the hide, known as the Graeue Gans, had been destroyed, torched by a person with a grudge against birders, we were told. New octagonal bases had already been poured in concrete however - so anyone visiting the area today will find beautiful new hides ready for use. Despite the lack of shelter, birds seen included Shelduck, Gadwall, Garganey, Little Ringed Plover, Kentish Plover, Temminck's Stint, Curlew Sandpiper and Black-tailed Godwit.

We drove on to the parking area for Wilgenbos, a largish area of willow woodland. Our walk here brought us Short-toed Treecreeper and Cuckoo. From Wilgenbos it was a 30 minute walk to the Cormorant colony at Noorderplassen. The track led us alongside a canal, where once again Marsh Harriers were very much in evidence; Marsh Harriers are the official symbol of Flevo. We were lucky enough to see an Osprey taking a fish from the water before arriving at the Cormorant colony where, apart from the many tree nesting Cormorants, we also found Spoonbills. Our day was complete. We finally drove to our hotel, the Postiljon, at Nulde Strand just across the Eemeer on the mainland. This proved to be a fine hotel in an ideal location for birding. The day tally of species was 92.

On Sunday the day dawned bright and sunny as about a third of our party met at the hotel entrance at 05.30hrs. Two Egyptian Geese were taking a Sunday morning stroll on Nulde Strand. We took off in the other direction after hearing Icterine Warbler. We took an elevated field track, with views across the reeds to the water of the Eemeer, with Black necked Grebe, Great crested Grebe, Little Grebe, Grey Heron and Moorhen. To landward, 40 Black-tailed Godwits were displaying with Marsh Harrier overhead. Then back to the hotel where 2 of the party had been watching Whiskered Tern.

Red-breasted Flycatcher David Mitchell

After breakfast were were on the trail of the Scarlet Rosefinch and 3 of our party saw it. We spent a while at the ponds of the nearby Lepalaarsplassen, where Spoonbill, Avocet, Purple Heron and other species were seen. The main party then made its way for a walk deeper into the Oostvaarderplassen reserve to the new Zeearend (Sea Eagle) hide. We were rewarded with sightings of Great Spotted Woodpecker with young, Bluethroat, Bearded Reedling and Woodchat Shrike. Time was now running out and we had to head back to Rotterdam and Europoort. We enjoyed a wonderful evening on board the ferry with an Indonesian buffet and musical entertainment in the *Flying Dutchman* bar. Our resident musical expert made several requests to the pianist, from Scott Joplin to Mozart's piano concerto. The pianist dealt with all requests with cool professionalism. The music was appreciated by the throng, despite many a case of *hoofdpijn* which is Dutch for *sair heid.*

The night was short and Monday was upon us. Fortunately, good appetites were still in evidence along with the *hoofdpijn.* Despite it all we were off to the RSPB reserve at Blacktoft Sands, where we had good views of Avocets with chicks, Marsh Harriers, Greenshank and Grasshopper Warbler. Our final port of call was Fairburn Ings, where a small number of intrepid birders made their way to one of the hides to see Little Gulls. We saw a Green Woodpecker fly across the reserve before wending our way home after a weekend of good birding, delightful company and a total of 126 species.

Tony Scott

Annual Conference 1996

Gales and lashing rain were soon banished by the warmth of the welcome at the Balavil Sport Hotel at Newtonmore as members arrived for the 60th Anniversary Conference. Standing in for the fire damaged Duke of Gordon Hotel at Kingussie, the Balavil had never before hosted such numbers, and the friendly helpfulness of the staff was widely appreciated. So, too, was the impeccable organisation of the event by Sylvia Laing and Pamela Black.

There were over 180 members present, but many more from the past were seen in Bobby Smith's slide show on the Friday evening. Marvellous shots of birds were interspersed with such rarities as Maury Meiklejohn, William Brotherstone and Roger Tory Peterson. The annual photographic competition produced real winners in superb slides of a Waxwing by Eric McCabe (first), an elusive Hawfinch by Bobby Smith (second), and a print of a Cuckoo by Gordon Yates (third).

The Cairngorms, visible across the Spey, were the subject of Saturday morning's programme. This was timely, with the current public consultation on the Cairngorm Partnership Board's draft Management Strategy, and the controversy over the proposed funicular at Coire Cas.

Rob Lambert gave a historian's view of the area as a cultural landscape from the introduction of sporting estates in Victorian times, through the proposals for National Parks starting in the 1920s and 30s, up to the creation of the National Nature Reserve in 1954. He traced the different perspectives of photographers from the Victorians, with their romantic but uninhabited mountain views, to the emergence of people and recreation in pictures early this century, and the use of photography for campaigning purposes later on. Pictures of the same scenes taken in the 1920s and 1990s showed side by side, revealed remarkably few differences. This in itself was significant. The old trees were older but there were still no seedlings coming up to replace them.

One of the biggest of the old sporting estates in the Cairngorms is Mar Lodge at the head of the River Dee. It has recently been acquired by the National Trust for Scotland, and Peter Holden, who has the job of managing it, sketched out the Trust's plans for it. It will continue as a sporting estate, but "run in a sustainable manner".

This will entail a major cull of Red Deer over the next 5 years, halving the present population of 3,500, and increasing the present 800 ha of native pinewood to almost 2,000 ha. Restoring the damage caused by the bulldozed track to the summit of Benn a' Bhuird will be a more intractable problem. There will be free public access "subject to the maintenance of landscape and nature conservation". Mar Lodge itself will be turned into holiday flats and, if the holiday makers feel like taking to the floor in the Victorian ballroom, they will apparently find themselves in a charnel house presided over by 3,600 pairs of antlers, perhaps a fitting memorial to a bygone era.

Adam Watson took as his subject the potential for wildlife in the Cairngorms, referring to a controversial talk about this he gave to the SOC 20 years ago and saying that the situation was much the same today, though there were great improvements on SNH and RSPB estates. Predator persecution, over-grazing and muirburn still blighted the area's potential, and he highlighted the shortage of scrub which is such a feature of comparable mountain country in Norway. The time was now right for action, he said, and the Cairngorms Partnership Board, of which he is a member, was seeking to bring about co-operation between all the varied interests to implement a sustainable strategy for the future. This would not be possible without extra government money.

His talk was followed by a lively discussion in which he and Stuart Rae fielded questions about solving conflicts in land use, further comparisons with Norway, the Millennium Forest, Glen Feshie, and the vexed questions of what happens if the partners in the Partnership Board do not in fact co-operate. In this last case an unspecified "big stick" was threatened. One speaker asked if the difficulty in tackling the area's problems was simply that we were all "too nice"? We were all too nice to agree.

The afternoon's field trips in sunshine and showers produced Golden Eagles, Red Kites, Crossbills, Crested Tits and, spectacularly and monochromatically, a White Stork in the Black Isle.

New ground was broken at the AGM by a contested election for the first time anyone could remember, surely a healthy development. Brian Downing pipped David Merrie to the post of Vice President, while Ian Darling was elected unopposed as President. A change to the constitution was adopted, making the term of both these offices 2 years instead of 3. In today's pressurised world a commitment to 6 years in successive offices was considered too much to ask. Ros Grant and Vicky MacLellan were elected to Council. Concern was expressed at the further fall in membership to 2,189 and relief at the nominal deficit in the Revenue Account. Subs will have to go up next year.

White Stork *Don Smith*

The annual dinner had no speeches for the first time though it could hardly be said to be speechless, and the following draw for the raffle showered prizes across the country in its usual liberal style. John Hamilton organised a splendid entertainment after dinner including a picture quiz in which Angus Hogg and Ray Murray pitted their wits and wit again Frank Hamilton and Ian Darling, and proved that (most of the time) they could all tell the difference between a Grey-tailed Tattler and a Spotless Starling.

Sunday morning started with the late Charles Palmar's film on Buzzards, a reminder of the outstanding photography of this stalwart of the Club, and Chris Mylne, who acted as projectionist for the whole weekend, following this with one of his own short films on owls. More memories of past members were evoked by Angus Erskine's talk about George and Irene Waterston's expeditions to arctic Canada and Greenland.

The intrepid Robert Rae (Skitts to many) then tackled Crossbill identification; intrepid because he ties himself to pine trees 60 feet above the ground and then goes out squirrel like to ring the nestling in the furthermost twigs. The trick for distinguishing Scottish from Common Crossbills appears to be to enlarge a picture of the bird to projector-screen size, whereupon it is easy to see the angled lower mandible of the Scottish: not so easy in the field. It is not surprising that it was separated only in 1969 and, as John Hamilton put it the previous evening:

I wis just pickin' at cones,
Mindin' my own business, my own,
When this bloke comes tae say,
That my DNA
Maks me unique tae this zone.

See this frae where I am sittin'
All my pals who annually flit in,
They're apoplectic
Say I'm Euro-sceptic,
When everyone's joinin' I'm splittin.

Noo I'm unique, I'm endangered,
So noo I'm surrounded by rangers,
And added tae which,
Noo I'm a new twitch,
The woods is all filled up wi' strangers.

There was more nostalgia in Chris Mylne's films of Club outings in the 1950s and 60s, including the 1966 International Ornithological Congress bird islands cruise, and Solway goose weekends with Willie Austin and his loud hailer marshalling a convoy of bulbous Morrises and Standards which later supported lines of telescopes. People didn't use tripods in those days.

Going right back to the start of the SOC in 1936 David Jardine then described those times as the lowest ebb of Scottish forestry. It was followed after the war by the great surge in conifer plantation to its present extent of well over a million hectares. Much of this was blanket plantation and some of it too near water courses. But he was optimistic about the future, both for the forests and their wildlife. Plantations will be better designed with smaller coups, and more dead wood and older trees left behind. A greater value is now attached to natural and semi natural woodland. As more conifers mature, more cone seed becomes available, benefiting Goldfinches and Bramblings as well as Crossbills. Siskins are everywhere and Goshawks are increasing. We even saw a picture of a tree nesting Merlin. The only shadow over the future in a world of increasing demand for timber was the prospect of Eucalyptus taking over Sitka Spruce.

Ray Murray, at the conclusion of his presidency, rounded off the Conference with a look forward for the same period. No fewer than 137 species have been added to the Scottish list since 1936 which saw the first Tawny Pipit and Booted Warbler. We now have breeding Ospreys, White-tailed Eagles and Red Kites. There have been huge increases in goose numbers and sea birds, particularly Gannets. And what of the future? "Will we see a Green Woodpecker nesting in a Millennium Forest tree on St Kilda in 2056?" he asked. Watch this space.

John Arnott

REVIEWS

Bird Songs and Calls of Britain and N Europe. *Geoff Sample. Collins £19.99 1996 ISBN 0-00-220037-6, 9-80002-200370*

This book comes with 2 CDs, each playing for 73 minutes with 97 tracks grouped according to habitat. They play continuously within each group, but every track can be played on its own. There are 152 species, but despite the title all are "British". The book has 10 pages on songs and calls in general, 19 pages of notes to the tracks, and then 64 pages of notes in species order, with some syllabic transcriptions of the usual kind. More species are included here than on the CDs, but the discs are more important.

Those for whom bird song is a problem may want to concentrate on species best picked up by their calls, and here there are difficulties. The background and the species sometimes merge, confusing the real beginner. Secondly, the voiceover comes after the call referred to, whereas it would often be better in advance. Some species are disappointingly omitted from the discs (eg Wryneck, Long-eared Owl, Barn Owl screech). Pinkfeet are represented by a single bird, not a flock.

The sound quality is mostly very good, with only very few lapses. The discs demand close attention to get the best out of them. Listening with one eye on the book notes and the other on the track number display on your player is recommended. The price seems fair. There may still be room on the market for an even better production to a similar plan, but we might have to wait a long time for it to appear.

John Law, Keith Macgregor

Note: *this book, with the CDs, is now in the Lending Library and available to members with CD players.*

Hybrid Ducks *ed Eric & Barry Gillham 1996 B L Gillham, PO Box 563, Wallington, Surrey SM6 9DX. 104pp. £15 (inc p&p) ISBN 0-9511556-0-2*

An invaluable contribution towards an inventory on hybrid ducks this book contains data on 161 hybrid combinations. Taking into account adults, ducklings, juveniles and immatures as well as multiple hybrids and those in aberrant plumage, it mentions c250 crosses. A total of 53 full colour and 3 black and white photographs depict 61 difference crosses. This book is a must for the ardent duck watcher.

Sylvia Laing

Golden Eagles *by Laurie Campbell and Roy Dennis. 1996. Published by Colin Baxter Photography Ltd., Grantown-on-Spey. 96 pp. £25 hardback. ISBN 0-948661-55-0.*

Golden Eagle *Steven Brown*

Arguably Scotland's most magnificent and charismatic bird, it is a hard taskmaster for those who wish to learn its secrets. The long hours spent in the field by eagle watchers such as Roy Dennis are possibly not conducive to the production of monographs and, therefore, this book is a rare delight. With his lengthy experience of eagles in a combination of roles as protector, educator and observer, Roy has recorded individual encounters with a freshness and enthusiasm which is a pleasure to read.

The combining of sections on the life cycle of the bird and short, vivid extracts from notebooks is very reminiscent of Seton Gordon's style and I was pleased to see mention of such links to those earlier studies as the octogenarian Pat Sandeman.

This is no sentimental narrative; Roy's eagles were not given pet names. The sections on persecution and all the other problems which they face are hard hitting and factual accounts of an often shameful history of man's treatment of our national bird.

The real hero of this book is, of course, the Golden Eagle and it has seldom , if ever, been so well captured as in Laurie Campbell's photographs. The quality of the shots is simply stunning; these are not arranged studio portraits, but pictures of a bird in its natural and often remote environment and as good as any I have seen for giving the feel of eagle country.

At first glance, the glossy format and large size give the impression of a coffee table book. Don't be fooled; this is as good a book on the Golden Eagle in Scotland as has yet been produced and has all the hallmarks of a classic.

Dave Dick

The Behaviour, Population, Biology and Physiology of Petrels *by John Warham. Academic Press. 1996. 613pp. £35. ISBN 0-12-735-4158.*

In 1990, John Warham published a book on The Ecology and Breeding Systems of the Petrels which was reviewed very favourably by David Mitchell in *SBN* in June 1991. The author calls this a companion volume. It covers in great detail the distribution and population of all the petrels, their food, behaviour and vocalisations, and their physiology. It is a scholarly book, 600 pages long, including 65 pages of references ranging from the Tasmanian Journal of Natural Sciences of 1846, which I doubt if any member of the SOC has read, to modern papers still in the press. I recommend this book unreservedly for anyone who has the slightest interest in Petrels, Shearwaters or Albatrosses, whether from an academic point of view or just as a birdwatcher looking at the Fulmars on Salisbury Crags.

Angus Erskine

The Tree Sparrow *by J Denis Summers-Smith. 1995. Published by the author. 205 pp. £24 hardback. ISBN 0-9525383-0*

This is a very scholarly monograph on an underrated species which is a favourite of mine and still common on my home patch. Publication by one of the foremost authorities on sparrows has come at an opportune time, as the Tree Sparrow is one of many farmland species in serious decline. It is also a well studied bird, making the book of great value to those concerned with the conservation of farmland birds. All facets of the Tree Sparrow's life are described: history, distribution, breeding, movements, feeding, population dynamics, the daily and annual cycle, and relationships with other birds and man. As well as drawing from his lifetime's work, the author has made an exhaustive search of the literature, evidenced by the 500 plus references cited.

Many readers will wish to skip some of the more scientific passages, although most of such data are condensed into a wide range of figures and tables. Each chapter concludes with a very valuable summary. Errors are few, although several references mentioned in the text are omitted from the bibliography, but this detracts little from the value of a worthy addition to the literature.

Norman Elkins

Library news

The Library has recently received some very generous donations of books and journals from Prof W C Wynne-Edwards, Valerie Thom, Arthur Smith and Donald Watson to all of whom we wish to record our grateful thanks. All such donations are most welcome. To encourage greater use of the Lending Library, for a trial period, items will be sent out *post free*. Borrowers will still be required to cover the cost of return postage as at present. Branch secretaries have lists of books in the Lending Section. Requests can be phoned to the Secretary at Regent Terrace or to the Librarian on **0131-445-2427.**

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SOC NOTICES

The 1997 Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference

The Clyde Branch are organising the 1997 Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference. It will be held in Caledonian University on Saturday 15th March. The programme promises to be a cracker.

There is a strong showing from the BTO. The Director, Jeremy Greenwood, will be present and Richard Bashford, National Organiser of the BTO's Breeding Birds Survey, will give us an insight into the early results from the survey. Also under the BTO banner, Chris Mead, will give a talk on *Birds 'n Roads*.

One of the main themes of the conference is birds of prey. Mark Rehfisch, Head of the BTO Wetlands and Coastal Ecology Unit, will talk on *Raptors and Waders*. Clyde Branch member Duncan Orr-Ewing will talk on his work on the Red Kite re-introduction and Jeff Watson will talk on Golden Eagles. Jeff has studied Golden Eagles for 15 years, and his major work *The Golden Eagle* is about to be published. Keith Brockie is providing the illustrations for Jeff's book and he will follow Jeff with a talk entitled *A Wildlife Portrait*.

Mike Madders from Islay will talk on *Hen Harriers* whilst Malcolm Olgivie will give us a rundown on birdwatching on Islay .

Our local recorder, Iain Gibson, will try to whet your appetite to return to the Clyde area with a talk on *Clyde Birdwatching*.

The last theme of the day will be conservation. Chris Rollie, RSPB Conservation Officer, will talk on *Burns and Birds*. We'll keep you guessing as to whether this refers to the poet or watercourses, and whether it really is a conservation talk! A hard conservation message will be delivered by Andrew Douse, Head of Ornithology with SNH, in his talk *Bio-diversity - Hands on in Scotland*. Bringing the conference to a close will be our own Bernie Zonfrillo on *Conservation and the Mexican Revolution*.

There will be plenty of space for stands and displays. Why don't branches bring displays showing what's going on in their area? Poster displays, or papers from individuals will also be welcome. If you would like to bring a display, please contact the organiser **John Simpson, 3 Mitchell Drive, Cardross, Argyll and Bute, G82 5JJ.**
A full programme is given elsewhere. Applications should be sent to **Sylvia at 21 Regent Terrace.**

David Merrie

Editorial Committee Chairman

This committee oversees the club's growing number of publications. Sandy Anderson, who has chaired it with unfailing courtesy and good humour for the past 5 years, has retired and we thank him for his contribution. Dr Malcolm Ogilvie, who needs no introduction to SOC members, has kindly agreed to take over. Besides a specialist knowledge of wildfowl Malcolm has years of experience in editorial work notably with *British Birds* and the *BWP* project.

National nest box week

This will be run by the BTO from 14-21 February 1997, which includes St Valentine's Day when birds traditionally pair. Individuals can get a pack from J Jayne & Co, NNBW, Freepost 1155, Canterbury CT3 4BR for £2.95 (cheques to NNBW). Groups wanting to run events should contact Chris Mead at the same address.

Thanks to

Thanks are once again due to the army of volunteers who willingly come into 21 every quarter and stuff envelopes. The stuffers for the June mailing were: Bob & Betty Smith, Sue Goode, Noreen Stabler, Joan Wilcox, Cath Craig, Rosemary Davidson, Frank Hamilton, Ruaridh Hamilton, Paul Speak, Brian Robertson, Peter Vandome and Margot Cruft.

Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club. It is published 4 times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices need to be sent to the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace no later than 5 weeks before publication. The magazine acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and to disseminate information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. The views expressed in articles in *Scottish Bird News* are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication. The SOC also publishes the journal *Scottish Birds* which publishes original papers and notes on Scottish Ornithology and the *Scottish Bird Report*. For details of these publications and membership contact the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

200 Club

Winners in the third quarter of 1996 were:-

July - 1st £30 K J Lee, Aberdeen; 2nd £20 Dr A V M Davidson, St Andrews; 3rd £10 Miss C G Thin, Edinburgh

August - 1st £30 M Holling, Stow; 2nd £25 E M Bird, Aberdeen; 3rd £20 R M Sellars, Nailsworth, Gloucs; 4th £10 Miss V M Thom, Perth

September - 1st £30 Capt. J I Owen, Melrose; 2nd £20 T D Dobson, Galashiels; 3rd £10 D M Stark, Thurso.

For details about joining the 200 Club please write to **Mrs Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL (Tel. 01896 822176).**

MEMBERS' REQUESTS

Wing tagged Red Kites and Sea Eagles

see *SBN* 40: pages 3 & 14

Wing tagged Hen Harriers, Colour ringed Ring Ouzels, Colour ringed Stonechats, Colour ringed Mute Swans and Colour ringed Reed Buntings

see *SBN* 43: page 15

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BIRDS

THE SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Scottish Bird News

MARCH 1997 No. 45
ISSN 0268-3199

Edited by Stan da Prato
Assisted by Pamela Black, Sylvia Laing and Joan Wilcox

Bias in the media

Political bias in the press is well known, especially in the run up to a General Election. Other forms of bias also occur, often mixed up with sensationalism, as in the treatment of social problems by the tabloids. The broadsheet papers, which like to describe themselves as the 'qualities', are often less knowledgeable than they like to appear and this often shows in their coverage of environmental issues. Scotland on Sunday's recent claim that seabirds such as Gannets and Fulmars were threatening to attack livestock is one example. Deliberate bias against conservation is unusual but it has occurred recently in the Telegraph to such an extent that the satirical magazine Private Eye ran almost a full page article on it, starting with the question "What has the Daily Telegraph got against the RSPB?" Although the Eye usually makes headlines whem some outraged public figure sues it for libel it has excellent contacts among the London based media so its account of the background to some extraordinary articles in Britain's biggest selling broadsheet is worth summarising.

Searches

In September 1996 police, assisted by RSPB investigations officers, searched several Welsh shooting estates looking for evidence of illegal trapping, shooting and poisoning of birds of prey on the Berwyn moors in Clwyd. One of the estates, Llanarmon, is owned by Robert McAlpine, former chairman of the construction company.

After the searches which the *Eye* but not the *Telegraph* says have led to charges being made against 2 gamekeepers, the *Telegraph's* environment editor, Charles Clover, gave Robert McAlpine a free hand to attack the RSPB in an article on 30 September 1996 and backed this up with an editorial condemning the society for its over zealous behaviour. "It is perfectly true we dislike falcons intensely because they kill enormous numbers of grouse" said McAlpine. He also accused RSPB investigators of terrifying gamekeepers' wives in searches on other estates. There were also accusations of the RSPB playing a lead role instead of the police on such occasions.

A Red Kite found poisoned on the McAlpine estate was the third confirmed alphachloralose incident in 7 years on Llanarmon. The moor's Hen Harriers and Peregrines have failed to rear any young since at least 1985.

Open season

Following its highly coloured reporting of the McAlpine raid, the *Telegraph* seemed to declare open season on the RSPB. On 8 October, the *Peterborough* column claimed that the society's chief executive, Barbara Young, was urging her colleagues to keep quiet on Labour's green record for fear of harming Tony Blair's election prospects, a story denied by Ms Young. On the same day, a letter from a gamekeeper's wife was published. Since then, the paper has reportedly declined to print letters defending the RSPB while finding space for critical ones.

Peregrine *William Paton*

APR 7 1997
LIBRARIES

Marsh Harrier *Steven Brown*

However, it may be more realistic to see it as further evidence of the determination by some landowners to have their way over predators irrespective of scientific research and public opinion.

It is not surprising that some British newspapers, which are mostly owned by a small number of rich individuals, should publicise the opinions of other rich individuals. Although some field sports, such as wildfowling, are traditionally classless, grouse shooting is not.

Scottish landowners

The *Sunday Express,* also a paper associated with the right, recently gave space to the views of the Scottish Landowers Federation which has claimed that some of its members are being persecuted by RSPB staff. SLF convenor Graeme Gordon was quoted as saying "We want to regard the RSPB as friends but the over zealous activity on the part of some officials has brought about ill feeling".

Hatchet job

In December 1996 the *Sunday Telegraph* wrongly accused the RSPB of keeping illegal computer records. On 14 December, the *Telegraph's* Saturday magazine carried a 5 page hatchet job by Fiametta Rocco, accusing the society of being dominated by whingeing townies who knew nothing about the realities of country life.

According to the *Eye,* Rocco is usually a serious journalist, so it is hard to believe that the article was all her own work - not least because of the number of errors it contained. She claimed that the RSPB has 20 bird reserves (it has 140), that it was founded in 1904 (1889) and that 1,000 people work at its Bedfordshire HQ (the true figure is 450).

"One Yorkshire landowner", she reported, "says his grouse numbers have been halved since 3 pairs of breeding kites were introduced to the area by the RSPB in 1993". There is no release scheme in Yorkshire, and the releases elsewhere are all carried out by the Government conservation agencies, English Nature and SNH.

Stranger still is Rocco's claim that, "Kestrels, which were virtually unknown in the sixties, have now topped 51,500. These birds (Kestrels, Sparrowhawks and Buzzards) have voracious appetites and there is nothing they like more than to feed off young Grouse and Pheasant".

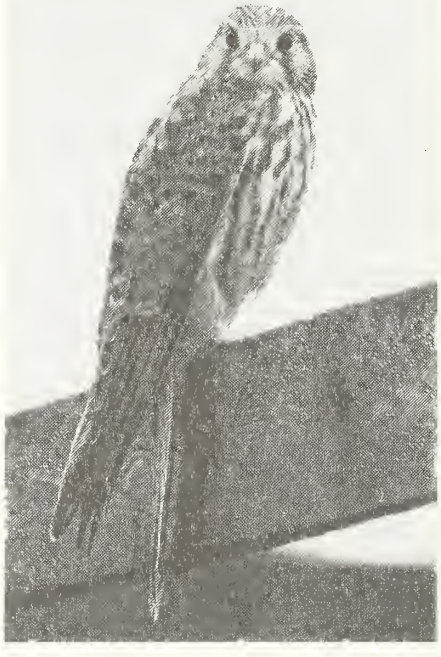
Frightening account

Ms Rocco also gave a frightening account of the experiences of a gamekeeper's wife near Peebles who talked of numerous instances when "RSPB officials take an active part in searches....even searching unsupervised by the police at the scene...have rummaged through wives' and daughters' underwear and children's toy boxes".

Of particular concern to anyone with any knowledge of ecology in Scotland are Rocco's claims that the head of RSPB admitted that the Langholm study into raptors and grouse will show that raptors do reduce grouse for shooting and that the much praised work in Abernethy (see pages 3-4) is based on poor quality research and this leads to a loss of deer from adjoining estates. Her allegation that Capercaillie breed in the Upper Cairngorms is ridiculous.

Motives

The *Eye* suggests that Ms Rocco's article was "tickled up" by other hands at the *Telegraph* . The paper's editor, Charles Moore, is an enthusiast for field sports, and Charles Clover is said to have warned Barbara Young recently that "we're not finished with you yet". As to the motive, the *Eye* speculates on the fact that the prospective Tory candidate for Clwyd South, the constituency which just happens to include Llanarmon, is *Telegraph* columnist Boris Johnson.



Kestrel *Don Smith*

Role of the police

The complaints are based on unspecified searches on gamekeepers' homes in search of poisons. RSPB has repeatedly pointed out that their staff are present at the invitation of the police who are responsible for the raids and that to date they have never received a single complaint concerning their staff's conduct during any such police operation.

Stan da Prato

RSPB research

The RSPB is a major sponsor of ornithological research in Scotland, sometimes in collaboration with other bodies. This section is based on the RSPB's useful research summaries which are normally published twice a year. Copies are in the Waterston Library. We have summarised those accounts of most interest to Scotland. The names at the end of each summary are of the researcher or relevant team leader in so far as we know who they are.

Scottish Crossbills

Some Crossbills breeding in the Highlands of Scotland have bill measurements intermediate between those of Common and Parrot Crossbills. Where Common and Scottish Crossbills breed together in Scotland, the 2 groups apparently do not hybridise, suggesting that they are separate species. If this is the case, then the Scottish Crossbill is Britain's only endemic bird. Until now, the Parrot Crossbill was believed to be such a rare breeder in Britain that the issue revolved around whether Common and Scottish Crossbills were distinct and, if they were, how to identify them reliably in the field.

RSPB researchers have trapped Crossbills in Scotland, categorised them as either Common or Scottish on bill measurements and noted whether they were genetically distinct from DNA analysis and whether their vocalisations were diagnostic.

Dr Jeff Groth, of the American Museum of Natural History in New York, an expert familiar with this type of work through his studies on American Red Crossbills, was contracted to help with the study. However, Crossbills proved very difficult to trap. Nine birds were trapped and their calls taped while the mitochondrial DNA was sequenced for 3 birds.

Initial findings show that there are large billed Crossbills breeding at Abernethy which are as large as Parrot Crossbills. The question is now "Are Scottish Crossbills distinct from Parrot Crossbills?"

The calls of the Parrots and the one Scottish type (on bill measurements) are not obviously differentiated, but clearly further recordings are required. The ND6 gene of the mit DNA was found to be the most variable and will be the gene on which to concentrate further work.

Ron Summers

Capercaillie

The Capercaillie became extinct in the UK in the late 18th century, possibly as a result of the felling of native pinewoods. Reintroduction to Perthshire in 1837-38 and subsequently in other areas proved successful but the late 20th century has seen a serious decline. A census between 1992-94 estimated the Scottish population at 2,200 (95% confidence limits: 1,500-3,200). There may have been 10 times this number in the early 1970s with concentrations in Strathspey, Deeside and Perthshire. The sex ratio was biased towards females, at a ratio of 2:1, though this ratio tended towards parity in native pinewoods. Native pinewoods also had the highest density of birds, at 3.60 per square km. The densities in other types of woodland were: 0.94 birds per square km in pole stage plantation, 0.41 birds per square km in mixed conifer plantation, 0.75 birds per square km in pre thicket and 0.57 birds per square km in thicket plantation.

Efforts to aid the recovery of Capercaillies are hampered by lack of ecological knowledge. The RSPB, the Forestry Authority, Game Conservancy Trust, ITE, Scottish Landowners' Federation, Scottish Office and SNH have a number of research programmes in progress. Some of the work is undertaken at the RSPB's Abernethy reserve which includes over 1,800 ha of semi natural native pine forest.

Capercaillies favour old trees in open forest and nest on the ground amongst deep Heather and Blaeberry. Twenty broods of Capercaillie chicks were fitted with radio tags in 1995 which allowed daily checks on locations. There was a significant preference for areas with a high cover of Blaeberry. Analyses of droppings from chicks showed that they ate Lepidoptera larvae, beetles, ants and Blaeberry berries. Blaeberry has a higher abundance of Lepidopter larvae, beetles and ants than Heather or mire vegetation. Lek sites at Abernethy occur in old, open semi natural woodland and old plantations.

Control of nest predators at Abernethy may have improved breeding success in 1994, when 15 hens produced an average of 2.9 chicks each; good weather in June probably also contributed to this success. In 1995, Crow control again started in March. The high survival of dummy nests showed that Crow activity was low, indicating that the control measures had been successful. Fox control levels were similar to previous years and counts of Fox scats on tracks have been constant

Charles Frank

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throughout the control period (1992-1995). Brood counts in late July showed that production was good, at 1.4 chicks per hen, above that for most of the forests which are compared to Abernethy.

Research in Abernethy and Glen Tanar found that approximately a third of Capercaillie deaths in a sample of 29 radio tagged birds were the result of collisions with deer fencing. A collision rate of 0.25 per km per month of fence was recorded. Collisions tended to occur with fencing close to moderately sized pines; the birds appeared to fly under the canopy failing to see the fence. At Abernethy, internal fencing has been removed and appropriate deer and sheep management adopted in its place.

The high number of deer in Scotland limits regeneration of native forest and, therefore, the Capercaillie's long term prospects. In the short term a voluntary ban on the shooting of Capercaillies is now in force.

Over 80% of Scotland's native pine forest is now notified as some form of conservation area. Conservation work for Capercaillies is still at an early stage. Results of research by all the organisations involved are awaited before a full review of action for the species can be undertaken.

Ron Summers

Red-necked Phalaropes

Within the UK the breeding range of the Red-necked Phalarope is restricted to Scottish islands, with the core of the population on Fetlar in Shetland. This population declined during the 1980s. Nearly all the remaining birds are on land managed by RSPB. Management has involved building sluices to raise overall water levels, digging pools and strimming or removing emergent vegetation to increase the area of standing water. Whilst this has proved successful in maintaining birds it has not resulted in an increase in population.

In 1992 RSPB started a project to assess the preferred habitat for phalaropes within Fetlar to determine the management practices which can be copied elsewhere. Adult phalaropes tend to prefer large pools with a substantial border of emergent vegetation. Management on the 3 main breeding mires has resulted in a substantial number of these pools. Some management of a fourth mire, with no breeding phalaropes since 1992, was undertaken in autumn 1994. Newly created open water outside the hide overlooking the site resulted in regular sightings of phalaropes by the public. Two males bred on or adjacent to the newly managed areas, both nests hatched successfully and fledged juveniles were recorded on the site.

Part of the work in 1995 involved visiting previous phalarope breeding sites around the British Isles. A number of sites still appear suitable, management recommendations for a number of others have been drawn up, whilst a few were considered to be totally unsuitable. Surprisingly, 15 phalaropes were recorded at 4 of the sites on the Western Isles during the summer. Breeding was only proved at one site, the only site away from Shetland where phalaropes regularly breed in the UK.

Mark O'Brien

Breeding birds of the Inner Tay reedbeds

The tidal reedbeds of the Tay Estuary form the largest area of continuous reed in the UK. Since the mid 1980s, they have been colonised by Marsh Harriers and Bearded Tits, significantly increasing the UK range of both these species. Bittern winter on the site. Since 1994 a RSPB/ SNH field officer has been employed at the site.

In 1995, as in 1994, 4 pairs of Marsh Harriers were present, producing 3 clutches and 2 broods totalling 9 young. All the young were wing tagged. A further pair fledged young within 10 km of the Tay and 2 other reedbeds locally were occupied throughout the season by birds fledged from, and tagged on, the Tay in previous years. Two young that fledged on the Tay in previous years have since bred in East Anglia.

A minimum of 14 pairs of Bearded Tits were present in a 3 km long section of the reedbed; the same stretch held a minimum of 18 pairs in 1994. At least 8 pairs had second broods in 1995. Although there are major problems in accurately surveying this species in a reedbed of this size, the surveys have provided a better understanding of the species' habitat preferences. No Bitterns were recorded breeding.

Landowner liaison was a very important part of the work following several years of dispute between landowners and local authorities over a proposed Local Nature Reserve. Landowners have rejected any kind of conservation management. However, regular communication between the fieldworker and landowners and the provision of full survey results over the 2 year period has created a much more positive view of bird management.

Bruce Anderson

Red-necked Phalarope *John Chapman*

Brian Turner

Black Grouse

Golden Eagle studies in Argyll

The study is being carried out in mid and south Argyll where sheep rearing and commercial forestry are the predominant land uses. Plantation forestry has been the main type of land use change in recent years. This study was jointly funded by the Forestry Commission and RSPB. Radio transmitters were fitted to 14 eagles, including 9 territorial adults and 5 younger birds. Non breeding birds have wandered widely. Territorial birds have been followed on a regular basis.

Preliminary analyses suggest that eagle habitat preferences rank in the following order. Montane >Grass >Heather >High forest > Bog > Pre thicket forest > Other woodland > Water. Eagle nest sites are relatively rare resources which should be conserved at all costs. Eagles defend their territories against intruding neighbours.

In the absence of near neighbours, eagles will range up to 9 km from their nest but mostly range within 2 km.

Mike McGrady and Justin Grant

Set aside and birds

Two years of fieldwork designed to ascertain whether set aside offered any benefits to birds ended in October 1995. The theory to be tested was that set aside fields with natural regeneration could replace the traditional stubble fields that have all but disappeared.

So far it seems seed eating birds such as Skylark, Linnet, Yellowhammer and Reed Bunting, all of which have declined severely, use this type of set aside to a much greater extent than all other farmland habitats. Set aside established after barley is preferred over set aside after any other crop. Results from the breeding season are not so clear cut. Set aside offers substantial benefits to declining farmland birds, especially in winter. The benefits could be significantly greater given improved management options. Nevertheless the scale on which set aside operates means that those benefits that are offered are available throughout much of the UK.

Andy Evans

Greenshank survey

The survey was undertaken within the known 10 km square range of the Greenshank in Britain, as defined by the 2 breeding atlases and other recent records, which is confined to Scotland. A preliminary analysis gives a population estimate of 870-1440 pairs.

Mark Hancock and David Gibbons

Black Grouse survey

Numbers of Black Grouse in Britain have been in decline since the turn of the century and there has been a corresponding contraction in range. Though there has been a great deal of work on this species in recent years, much of this by the Game Conservancy, a nationwide field survey based on randomised census plots had never been undertaken. 1995, however, saw the first 2 seasons of fieldwork for a joint RSPB/ JNCC/Game Conservancy/EN/SNH Black Grouse survey. The aim of this survey is to obtain an accurate estimate of the size of the Black Grouse population in Britain and to set a baseline for future monitoring at 10 yearly intervals. The stronghold of the Black Grouse is in Scotland and northern England.

The early spring weather of 1995 was very favourable and coverage was excellent. A complete survey of Welsh leks was achieved and 1125 km squares were surveyed (55% of the total) in Scotland and northern England, leaving the remaining 90 to be checked in 1996. Interim results suggest that the population may currently be much smaller than previously thought, at about 5,000 leking males.

Brian Etheridge and David Gibbons

The effects of forestry on Hen Harriers

This project, funded by RSPB and carried out by the Applied Ornithology Unit of Glasgow University, is based on 4 study sites in Argyll. In April-August 1992-94, watches of Hen Harriers in sample areas of first and second rotation conifer plantations and various types of moorland were undertaken. Within each area the time spent and the routes chosen by foraging harriers were recorded. A range of habitat variables were measured within each area and assessments made of bird and small mammal prey abundance.

Foraging harriers exhibit a strong preference for afforested habitats with limited tree development. Habitat use declines with increasing tree foliage development between 2 and 5 metres height, rather than as a direct result of greater tree height. Harriers tend to avoid areas where tree canopy closure has occurred. In unafforested areas, harriers prefer to forage over tall vegetation, except Bracken, and make use of linear landscape features, such as streams and ditches. Hen Harriers spend most time foraging in habitats with a high abundance of Meadow Pipits. At 7 harrier nests, monitored to identify prey delivered to chicks, small songbirds, principally pipits, were the most frequently delivered item. Field voles were an important component of nestling diet in 1994 only, when they were relatively abundant in the study sites.

Mike Madders

Crow cage traps - The case for tighter legislation

Being used in open country for the purpose of catching mainly non territorial Crows in winter, crow traps are also visited by a wide variety of protected species of birds. The death of a ringed juvenile female Golden Eagle in such a trap on a Perthshire estate in January 1996 was a reminder of this fact; however, the RSPB has received many other reports of both live and dead protected birds being found in crow traps throughout Scotland.

To quantify and clarify the situation with regard to the Scottish countryside, a short report was compiled from recent reports to the RSPB. Scottish Raptor Study Group members also proved to be an extremely useful source of information.

Optimism

This report is now with the Scottish Office for consideration. Initial discussions on the subject have met with an encouraging response, and there is optimism that the simple changes to the law which are necessary will be forthcoming. It is hoped that this article can help educate readers with regard to this legitimate form of crow control while showing up the dangers to other wild birds from careless or negligent use.

The crow trap, normally referred to as a "cage trap" or "funnel trap", is widely used in the uplands of Scotland. It has a long history of use in this country and is recommended by game and agricultural advisors for multiple live trapping of Crows, Magpies, Rooks and Jackdaws. The latter 2 species are also caught in the similar ladder cage trap, which has a series of narrow entrance holes differing from the normally, single entrance funnel trap. It should be stressed here that these are normally large "walk-in" constructions up to 4m square,and should not be confused with the smaller multi compartment Larsen Trap.

Legal definition

The legitimate use of these traps is covered by the catch all phrase "cage trap" in section 5(5)(a) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. This repeated the exception to the general illegality of trapping wild birds mentioned in section 5(4)(a) of the Protection of Birds Act 1954.

Wheatear *Edmund Fellowes*

There appears to be no definition or description of "cage trap" in any UK, or specifically Scottish, legislation. This lack of direction has led to a proliferation of cage trap designs, and uncertainty over terms of use and maintenance of the wide variety of types of cage trap. This uncertainty is shared by users of the traps and by the various agencies involved with advice on and enforcement of wildlife legislation.

Perhaps even more surprising is that there is no statutory requirement over time between inspections of the traps. The general belief that such traps when set must be checked every 24 hours appears to have no basis in law.

The report contains detail on over 40 incidents of live and dead protected species found trapped in crow cage traps, many of these reports are of multiple catches. These reports were restricted to the last 10 years (the majority in fact, since 1990) to emphasise the relevance and on going nature of the problem.

Analysis

Golden Eagles are a particular worry with regard to these traps. Dispersing young birds are the most likely victims as with the January 1996 chick. Wide dispersal of juveniles into areas without resident eagles is a recognised pattern of both the Scottish and tiny English population.

As these birds do not breed until they are at least 5 years old they are at risk for a considerable period in areas where their presence may not be accepted by the local vermin controller. In addition to reducing the necessary recruitment to the small UK breeding population of approximately 430 pairs, deaths of these young birds may also prevent the possible expansion of this species into its ancestral haunts outside the north and west.

Several reports were received of multiple trapping of Kestrel family groups. It is of interest that most reports concerned the summer months, after young have fledged.

These birds are not normally carrion eaters and they are therefore not entering funnel traps to get at crow bait. What is more likely is that the initial bird is attracted by smaller birds and rodents feeding on grain, or insects and maggots produced by carrion. Once a bird is trapped the others are attracted by its movements and a mixture of curiosity and familial attraction draws them into the same trap.

Unlike the larger Buzzards and eagles, Kestrels cannot survive long periods without food and shelter and are likely to die from hunger and exposure if not released relatively quickly.

Other bird species

Perhaps the most surprising finding was the number of records of small passerines found trapped.

Although many large funnel traps are constructed using wide mesh wire netting, a significant proportion have finer mesh as the main component. Once a small bird gains entry it is trapped as completely as any crow.

It is considered that these small birds are entering in order to feed on grain left by the trapper as bait for corvids, or to eat invertebrates encouraged by bait carcasses. Wheatears, in particular, feed exclusively on invertebrates unlike the various thrush species which have a more varied diet but which would be attracted by grain or invertebrates.

The reports of deaths of these birds should come as no surprise given their need for continuous daytime feeding and lack of roosting cover at night. The trapping of an

adult Wheatear in May underlines the danger to the families of trapped birds - both sexes of Wheatear feed young in the nest and this bird is very likely to have had dependent young going hungry somewhere near the trap.

Conclusions

1. A wide range of protected species are being accidentally trapped in funnel and ladder traps.

2. Some species are attracted by decoy crows but most are associated with decaying bait items.

3. Trapped birds appear to attract others of their own species.

4. Although Eagles and Buzzards may survive a few days in cage traps, these birds may damage themselves attempting to escape.

5. Smaller birds, including locally scarce birds such as Barn Owls, are at risk from starvation and exposure within hours rather than days, particularly in winter.

6. The dependent young of trapped adult birds can be at risk.

7. Cases of set traps being left unattended for extended periods are not unusual.

Recommendations

I. A maximum period of 24 hours between visits to these traps should be a legal requirement.

This is a normal and accepted requirement for vermin controllers using spring traps or snares.

2. When not in use traps should be locked open.

At present some funnel traps and Larsen traps are padlocked shut when set, to prevent removal of decoy or trapped birds by uninformed members of the public. This would therefore be an adaptation of a relatively common practice and would prevent setting of traps either maliciously or by the actions of weather or stock.

Dave Dick

Dave is the Senior Investigations Officer for the RSPB in Scotland.

Eigg on whose face?

The sorry tale of Eigg continues. As the saga has been extensively reported in the media and the ornithological interest of the island is not particularly high, unlike some of its neighbours such as Rum, this short account merely summarises the ownership issue as Eigg undoubtedly seems to highlight the problems that too often follow when rich individuals buy up large areas of Scotland.

For years Eigg was owned by one Keith Schellenberg a larger than life Englishman who at first talked very positively of developing Eigg in ways that would promote conservation and provide a living for the islanders. Things did not go well and disillusion set in on both side with accusations of wrong doing as when Schellenberg's Rolls Royce was burned out.

In 1995 Schellenberg sold out to a mysterious German artist known as Maruma. Media attempts to establish why a painter no one seemed to have heard of could afford to buy an island and claim he had further funding to develop it produced vague replies to the effect that the artist sold his work privately. Given the state of Eigg and the desire to be rid of the previous owner some excessive optimism on the part of the islanders seems justified. However the media should have known better. One of the *Scotsman's* editorial team wrote a reasonably optimistic account of the new owner and his plans.

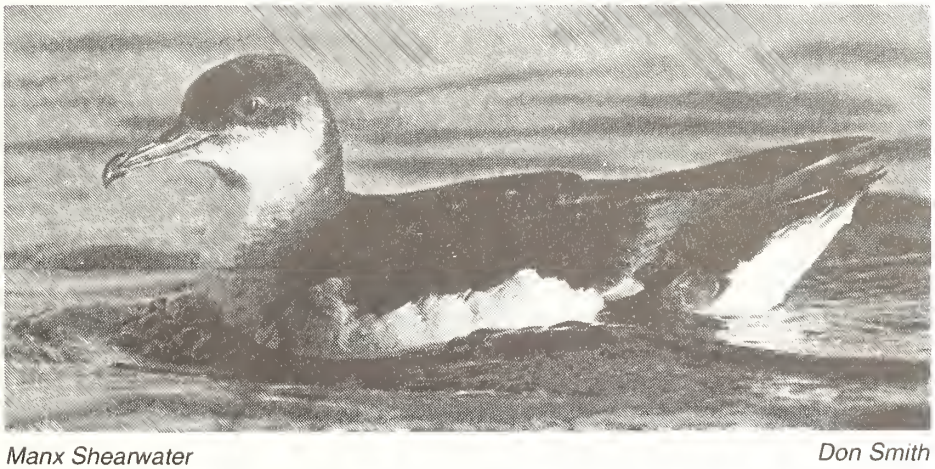
More realistic observers were not surprised that Maruma did nothing for Eigg. He was soon as unpopular as his predecessor. However he did agree to put the island on the market albeit for £2million. This led to local people, Highland Council and the Scottish Wildlife Trust forming a consortium called the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust to try to buy the island. The involvement of SWT is a most interesting development given the local opposition that has developed against conservation bodies on some other Hebridean islands.

The Trust's bid was dependent on the promise of lottery funding. It ran into problems. At 1.5 million it was well short of Maruma's demand although close to the valuation. It was also refused lottery funding on the grounds that there were too many locals on the Trust's board who could stand to gain from the plans. This caused outrage throughout the Highlands as people queried how it was acceptable for £12 million to be paid to the Churchill family for Sir Winston's papers but not acceptable to put a much smaller sum into a community project with the potential to redress years of neglect.

At this point some light relief was injected into proceedings by representatives claiming to speak for the giant opera star Luciano Pavarotti. They expressed an interest in buying Eigg as the site for an academy to take c3000 people! Once they had recovered from the shock Highland Council officials explained that the island had no mains electricity or running water, and no harbour at which Mr Pavarotti could land in any degree of comfort.

The Pavarotti Foundation, whose links with the singer have been questioned, are now said to be pursuing this plan elsewhere in the Highlands. However their interest helped to reveal that when Maruma bought Eigg he did so as the frontman for a group of 6 German businessmen who together raised the £1.6 million price. Furthermore loans taken out with the island as security are now with foreign companies e.g. in Hong Kong.

Meanwhile Eigg's future is still uncertain. The Trust now says it has pledges of £1.4 million and is determined to keep bidding. Demands for some form of compulsory purchase are understandably increasing.



Manx Shearwater *Don Smith*

Fish eating birds

This review article is based on the proceedings of a one day seminar held in February 1994. It was hosted by English Nature and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and centred on licensing in England. However, the majority of shooting licences and some of the most important piscivorous bird populations are found in Scotland.

The seminar brought together organisations concerned with bird conservation, along with the Government, to examine the issues surrounding the political hot potato of commercial fisheries and fish eating birds. The gathering was hosted by English Nature and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and concentrated on the 4 main species of concern to fishery operators in Britain and Ireland; Cormorant, Goosander, Red-breasted Merganser and Grey Heron.

Overview

They also examined the licensing issues. The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust have reviewed the issues of population status and distribution, foraging behaviour, diet and potential impact on fisheries. Based on a review of available literature, its' summary provided 9 key points; the 2 most important perhaps being
i) Dietary studies have severe limitations, are restricted in scope, are difficult to assess and the studies carried out so far indicate a variable diet for all bird species.
ii) Impacts are highly complex and difficult to assess without much better information on the interactions between the birds and fish communities. The WWT paper ends somewhat disappointingly with the sentence "In the short term, it is clear that bird fishery conflicts are likely to worsen in response to growing piscivorous bird populations".

Not only is this pessimistic, but population increases are not a forgone conclusion. In reality, with the benefit of information obtained since the seminar, evidence suggests that some populations may be declining. Red-breasted Mergansers are still scarce, Goosander numbers have declined since 1990 and there are signs that the numbers of wintering Cormorants may have declined by 3000 between 1992 and 1995.

Perceptions

One of the biggest problems, that of perception, was not really dealt with. There is a perception amongst some anglers and fishery owners that there is a massive problem. How do we get wider recognition that fisheries issues are a lot more complex than simply piscivorous birds destroying large numbers of fisheries when there is no hard evidence to support this? Perhaps the answer lies with the grass-roots anglers, some of whom seem at odds with the vociferous minority of landowners who continue to insist that birds are the problem. From personal discussions with several anglers on the river bank it appears that piscivorous birds are not necessarily perceived to be the problem that they are made out to be. In fact many anglers went fishing in the hope that they would see wildlife like Herons and Goosanders as well as catch fish.

English Nature's remit is to identify when it is reasonable for the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food to issue licenses to shoot piscivorous birds. Agricultural Departments need to establish that damage to a fishery is 'significant' and that the shooting licenses they issue will be effective in 'preventing' such damage. English Nature state that the shooting of large numbers of birds to maintain the financial viability of a fishery is unacceptable and that, as a result, widespread culling is not an option. They go on to say that it should be a requirement for fishery operators to prevent predators gaining access to the fish by non lethal methods where appropriate. Shooting licences should only be issued as a last resort, following a range of scaring or deterrence methods. English Nature are concerned that a sufficient level of proof is obtained to demonstrate that serious damage is occurring and that it can be attributed to fish eating birds. They do not accept that the presence of fish eating birds equals net loss of economically valuable fish.

Relevance to Scotland

Tne relevance of this to Scotland is the apparently different position taken by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the Scottish Office Agricultural and Fisheries Department (SOAFD as they were). On the basis of evidence that is kept secret, the Scottish Office issues far more licenses to kill birds than in England. If such scientific evidence does exist from Scotland, then why didn't the delegates from both SNH and SOAFD counter the seminar finding that "no study in Britain or Ireland has demonstrated, without doubt, serious losses to fisheries attributed solely to bird predation"?

One final question remains, should SNH convene a similar seminar in Scotland?

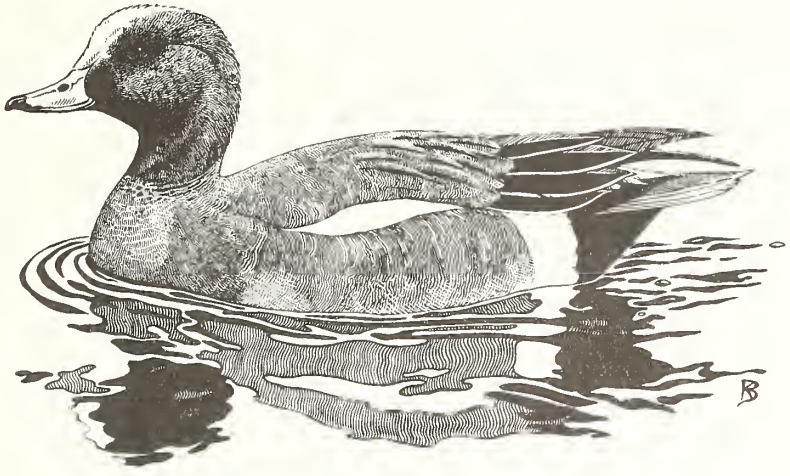
Peter Cosgrove

Fish-eating birds: proceedings of a seminar to review status, interactions with fisheries and licensing issues.
edited by J S Holmes and P Clement. Published by JNCC, 1996. 20 pages ISBN 1 873701 624. Price £8.00 inc p & p.

Goosander Mike Ashley

The tale of a breeding Wigeon

Wigeon are among our most attractive ducks. Most of us know them as winter visitors, often in considerable numbers, to coasts and inland waterbodies with edges suitable for grazing. Most of the Wigeon that visit us in the winter fly east to breed. However small numbers do breed in Scotland and, since 1988, a population near Braemar has been colour ringed.



Wigeon *Keith Brockie*

The yellow female

Seven nesting females have been individually colour ringed to study breeding success. A recent ringing recovery brought news of a sad end to one of these females. The bird was trapped and ringed (yellow ring, right leg) on the nest on 29 May 1992. My wife and I had first been alerted to the possibility of a nest by a calling drake on the river outside our tent at 4.30 am the previous weekend and by Mick Marquiss, who had also noticed the lone drake. A very early start on 23 May was rewarded with the pair of Wigeon flying in at 4.00 am and landing on the river near the tent. The female then left the drake and flew up into her nest in a heather bank.

We returned the following weekend to catch her for ringing and measuring. She sat very tightly and allowed us to stroke her before she flushed into the net off her 9 eggs. She was aged as an adult and quickly colour ringed and measured before release. On release she flew a short distance up river before landing to preen. A juvenile pair of Wigeon had been observed prospecting this same area in 1991 and this had probably been this female returning to breed for the first time.

Loss of ducklings

When the nest was rechecked on 2 June all the eggs had hatched and the nest was empty. On 5 June "yellow female" was seen at the duckling nursery area 1 km up river with 4 ducklings. In this population all the females normally lead their broods to a favoured communal nursery area where they remain until fledging. This allows easy observation of brood size and fledging success. The following day she was seen with 2 ducklings in the morning and 3 in the evening which seemed peculiar. Prolonged observations revealed she had a habit of losing ducklings and finding them again later. She regularly wandered or flew off leaving her brood unattended. Despite her lackadaisical outlook towards motherhood she successfully reared 2 ducklings in 1992.

Next year

She returned in 1993. She was seen with a drake at the nursery area on 4 April and the pair were seen on the river below last year's nest site and prospecting in the heather on 10 April. A search on 25 April revealed 7 eggs covered in down and grass in the heather only a few metres from the previous year's nest. The female was seen off the nest feeding vigorously on 22 May. This allowed us to check the nest site which was found to contain 10 down covered eggs. When rechecked on 6 June all the eggs had hatched successfully and the nest was empty. Despite regular visits during June and July, she was not seen again. In 1993 only 4 breeding attempts were confirmed out of 10 pairs present in April and only one duckling fledged.

The yellow female returned again in 1994, this time with a limping male. They were together at the nursery area throughout April. When searching in the vicinity of her previous years' nests on 1 May I accidentally flushed her off 10 eggs. Further disturbance later in the day resulted in her deserting her nest, presumably as she had only just begun incubation. Amazingly, on 19 June, she appeared at the nursery area with 7 ducklings, 2 to 3 days old. This meant she had almost immediately relaid a replacement clutch during May. Attentiveness to her brood had not really improved, however, and, as in 1992, counts of her ducklings varied, sometimes down to as low as 3. The brood had decreased to 4 on 10 July when we rounded them up for ringing. By early August the 4 ducklings had successfully fledged. She reappeared in 1995. Observations were sporadic in 1995 but she was seen on 9 July in the usual nursery ditch with 6 large ducklings which all fledged successfully.

Old favourite

In February 1996 a recovery slip arrived from the BTO to say that the yellow female had been shot at Blakeney, Norfolk on 22 December 1995. The feeling of excitement at our first long distance ringing recovery from this breeding population was tinged with more than a little sadness at losing such an old favourite. In the 4 years we were able to identify her on the breeding grounds, she had returned to within 50 metres to nest on the 3 occasions the nest was found and successfully raised 12 ducklings. Her productivity was above average for this population.

This study was kindly supported by research grants from the SOC, BTO and WWT and many keen Grampian Ringing Group members to whom I am very grateful.

Raymond Duncan

Predators and politics

The SOC does not get involved in party politics although the Editor is strongly suspected of drawing inspiration from the Monster Raving Loony Party. However when Labour's Shadow Scottish Secretary pointed out on TV recently "that Scotland now has more breeding pairs of Ospreys than Tory councillors" our imaginations were stimulated.

At the 1995 local government elections 82 Conservatives were elected while the most recent count of Ospreys gives 99 breeding pairs in 1995 and 104 in 1996.

This raises the intriguing possibility that the Conservatives will soon approach RSPB for advice on how to improve their declining fortunes. The possibilities are fascinating.

Will an area of suitable habitat be declared a reserve? If so, a bungalow in Bearsden or Corstorphine seems more appropriate than Loch Garten. Will the bungalow become the sort of tourist attraction that Loch Garten has? That would certainly meet with approval from the Tourist Board. However, to attract the visitors an interpretation centre will need to be built which might upset the planning department. Also, visits to the Ospreys are enhanced by intimate views into the nest using high powered telescopes and closed circuit videos. Will this be acceptable in Bearsden or even contemplated in Corstorphine?

Perhaps tax cuts would be a safer election strategy after all!

Pied Wagtail behaviour

A Pied Wagtail chasing a House Martin is not as unusual as suggested in *SBN 43*. I have twice seen a Pied Wagtail chasing a hirundine and have also seen one chase 6 other bird species: Starling, House Sparrow, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Meadow Pipit and Common Sandpiper. By chasing I mean deliberate pursuit, not the kind of mobbing I have also seen Pied Wagtails do with Little Owl, Cuckoo and Carrion Crow. And, of course, Pied Wagtails will chase each other. Just what the signal is that sets off this behaviour is not clear.

Richard Fitter

Hot bedding

Mid November, full circle, the Wrens are back in the garden again. After the first hard frosts of the winter they are looking for somewhere warm to spend the night. Today one of them is checking out their old roost. At the gable end of the house, beside a chimney stack, immediately above our bedroom, 3 slates lie proud of the wall, with a half inch gap below them. Here, last winter, for about 3 months, up to 27 Wrens congregated each night. Approaching from all directions, they would first alight on a nearby roof ridge, guttering, fence or bush. A quick look around, and then a rapid flight to the entrance. One had to be very attentive to catch sight of them in the gloaming, it is likely that on some nights I missed some. On most nights the first would arrive between 6 and 12 minutes after sunset with up to 15 arriving in one 5 minute period. The last entrant was about 20 minutes after the first. On one occasion, when there had been a day of heavy snow and the evening was dark and overcast, the first arrival was 10 minutes before sunset, and the last 10 minutes after. Up to the end of February, arrivals were more erratic. Some would come out again after entering. There were sounds of bickering within, and often snatches of song before entering.

Not long after the Wrens ceased to use the site, a pair of Blue Tits took a close interest in it. We were away for part of May and early June, and so could not follow their story completely, but it appears they nested and raised young.

On 7 July I noticed a pair of Tree Sparrows bringing nest material to the same place. For the next 5 weeks they were present every day. The cock would sing from the chimney pot and both would perch on the roof on the way to the nest. We did not see the young fledge but activities ceased in mid August, consistent with successful fledging of a brood.

And now the Wrens are back. I hope they find enough room, and not too many parasites.

David Merrie

Wrens *Frances Godfrey*

Scottish Ringers' Conference 1996

Scottish ringers from Shetland to the Solway along with a fair scattering of ringers from south of the border descended on the Fyffe Arms Hotel in Braemar on 15 November 1996 for the 22nd Scottish Ringers' Conference which was hosted by the Highland Ringing Group.

The Friday night is traditionally an informal night in and around the bar but a superb talk on wading birds of arctic Norway by Skitts Rae temporarily enticed even the most serious drinkers away from the bar. This was followed by slides of bird ringing in South Africa by Mike Fraser.

The Saturday morning session started with a Greylag Goose session. Bob Swann presented the results of the Highland Ringing Group's recent work on this species showing that the main thing about their movements was that they were unpredictable. Tony Mainwood showed that most of the native Sutherland birds remained within Sutherland and Caithness avoiding the Icelandic immigrants though 2 had turned up in Yorkshire! Carl Mitchell then told us how he had caught geese in Iceland and informed us of the very high shooting pressure the geese faced there; over 30,000 Greylags shot in one year. The morning session continued with Brian Etheridge showing the high level of persecution being faced by Harriers on grouse moors, whilst Dave Anderson showed that Goshawks were also being strongly persecuted outwith Forestry Commission woodlands. Will Peach of the BTO then demonstrated the value that retraps of ringed birds can have in assessing mortality rates.

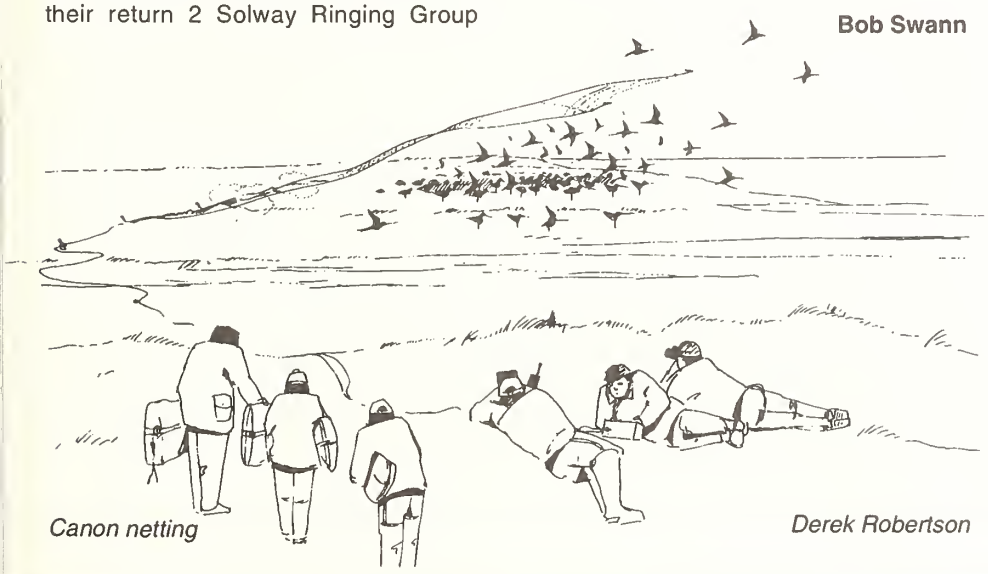
Saturday afternoon saw most folk out birding searching for geese, Capers or eagles with some degree of success. On their return 2 Solway Ringing Group stalwarts spoke to us. Ken Bruce gave us details of the spread of breeding Reed Warblers into the South West and Bobby Smith, accompanied by superb photographs, showed us how to construct a Sand Martin breeding bank - assuming you first locate a benevolent benefactor to put up the cash. The BTO session then followed with a heated debate about ringing rare birds.

The evening session in the bar resulted in much informal discussion and appeared to be thoroughly enjoyed by all who participated in so far as they can remember.

Most conference goers were up surprisingly sharp on Sunday morning to hear Les Hatton give a very amusing account of the trials of bird ringing on the Greek island of Lesbos. This was followed by Brian Etheridge, who had been drafted in at short notice to present Ron Summers' talk on rings for Turnstones. Despite being apparently bewildered by the odd statistical point he successfully showed us why stainless steel rings were just as useless as Incoloy ones for this species. Guy Thomson then kept us up to date with an account of current RSPB Corncrake studies in the Hebrides, to be followed by Hugh Insley who presented the results of 20 years of Highland Ringing Group data on Redshanks. Finally, Ronnie Graham rounded things off with an amusing account of Highland Ringing Group members past and present and some of the crazy things they got up to in their search for ornithological knowledge.

The event was attended by 154 people and voted a resounding success. Next year it's the turn of the Grampian Ringing Group to organise things. See you at Braemar in 1997.

Bob Swann



Canon netting *Derek Robertson*

The Arisaig Hotel

Family run hotel on Arisaig Bay looking over to the island of Eigg. Arisaig provides access to both moorland and coastline offering a great variety of habitats to naturalists. There are boat trips from the harbour opposite the hotel out to the Small Isles - Eigg, Muck and Rum with frequent sightings of whales and dolphins. Accessible by train Arisaig is an ideal location for a holiday that combines seashore, mountains and boat trips.

For more information contact Mr & Mrs Ross, Arisaig Hotel, Arisaig, Inverness-shire PH39 4NH. Tel 01687 450210 Fax 01687 450310

Swift architecture

The BTO and RSPB have launched a campaign urging architects and builders to design buildings that provide nesting places for Swifts. Although there is no evidence of a decline in Swift numbers, the demolition and conversion of old buildings and reduced accessibility to roof spaces could be removing available nest sites for the birds. The campaign will offer advice on the design of roofs which meet building regulations but also provide access for Swifts, and will encourage the use of Swift nest boxes based on a design successfully pioneered in Germany. A leaflet on how to assist Swifts is available from ***BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU.***

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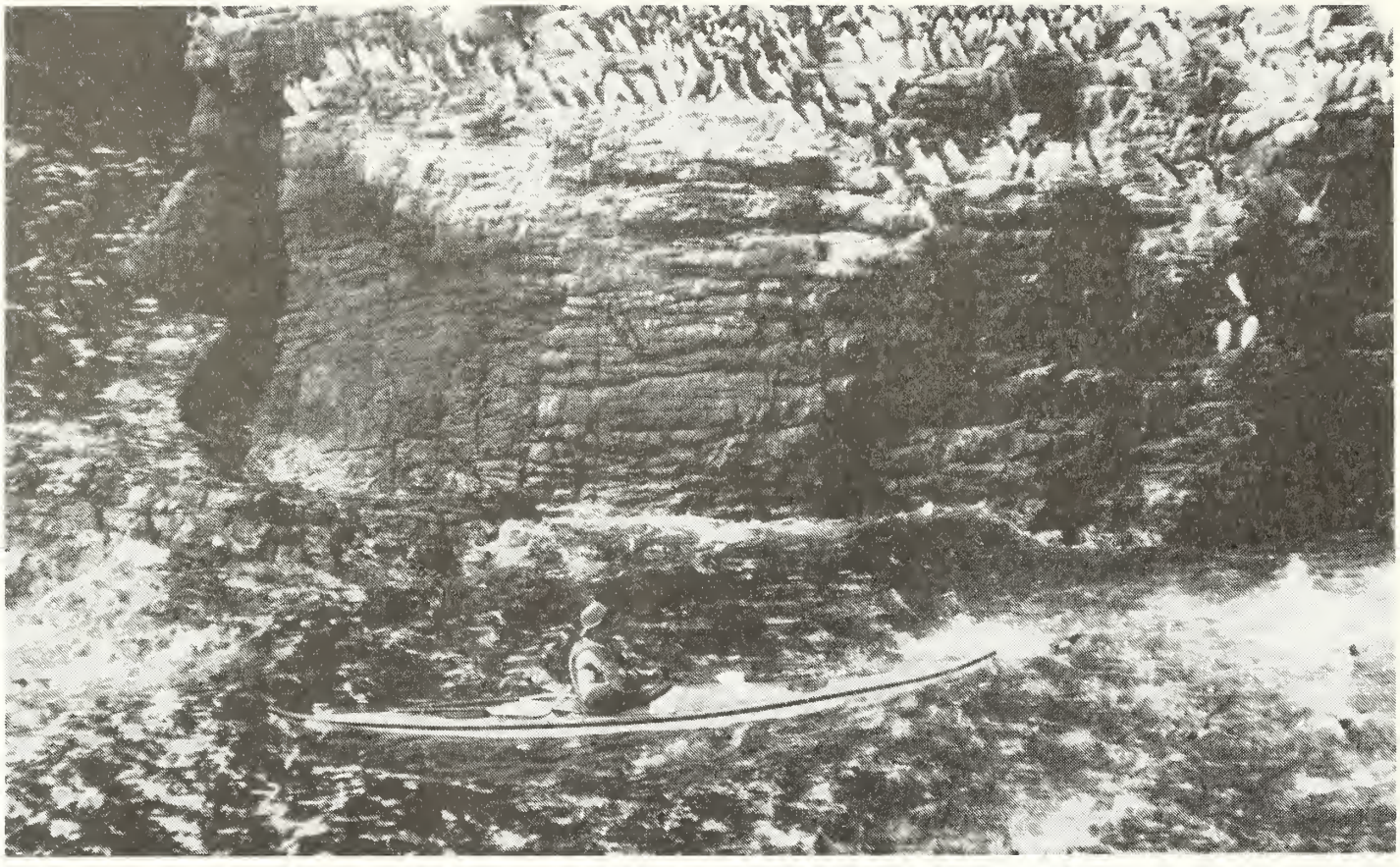


A canoeist disturbing breeding Guillemots on the Isle of May in June 1996. Some eggs were lost during this event.

Mike Harris

Young and the old on the Isle of May

The boat unloaded its day trip party on the Isle of May. There seemed so many, but an hour or so later you'd be hard pushed to find any of them. Later Beth and I caught sight of one of them, a young lad at the western cliff top, throwing stones into the sea far below.

He reminded me of a painful time of my own teen years. I was fond of lobbing a stone into water - any water. On one particular occasion, I had done if off an Irish cliff and watched as the flat disc arched and swung towards the sea. Then I watched in horror as a Shag unexpectedly surfaced. The stone from the sky sliced into its head. I can remember the sharp thud even now. The bird dipped its bleeding face in and out of the water in a frantic attempt to clear the pain and the blood and then it dived, surfacing motionless 5 metres away. I'd never told anyone of this event, but seeing this lad on the Isle of May brought it all back. Strangely enough, that 1950s incident was a major reason why I later opted for ornithological research. As a research student in Aberdeen with George Dunnet I found myself absorbing much of the past as well as my particular project on Oystercatchers. The past became important to me. I saw that there was a golden age of ornithology which laid the foundations of knowledge on which my own research - and that of many others - was based. In this Golden Age all you needed was curiosity, a pair of binoculars, wellies, a pencil and a notebook. Computers were hardly invented.

And here I was at last on the Isle of May: I was there because it was the one Scottish bird observatory that I hadn't visited, and about which I had heard so much whilst at Culterty. Here I found myself brought face to face with my past on 2 different planes: the pain of youthful thoughtlessness and The Golden Age. For amongst the many books in the tiny 6 bed Low Light building was a photocopy of the first visitors' book, dating from 1934. A browse through its pages took my breath away.

There they were - the signatures of the Greats who had actually sat where I sat, listened to the waves below the house as I listened and became stranded on the isle as I was stranded. It was a roll call of many whom I judge to be the doyens of Scottish ornithology; I've jotted down a word or phrase beside some - to remind me of an association special for me.

WB Alexander, RE Moreau and EV Watson - 3 of the first great ornithological thinkers. Of the rest, there stand out...*RM Lockley (Skokholm), George Waterston (Fair Isle), MFM Meiklejohn (Hoodwinks and humour - and some Italian), HN Southern (EGI, Oxford), RB Sibson (NZ), VC Wynne-Edwards (population regulation theory and my own professor at Aberdeen) RSR Fitter (Field Guides), Finnur Gudmundsson (Iceland), Eric Ennion (Monks House and art), C Mackworth-Praed (Where was 'Grant'?), BW Tucker, (Witherby's fame), Ken Williamson (Fair Isle's first warden), GVT Matthews (migration studies and Slimbridge), WJ Eggeling (Scottish conservation), Betty Garden (Ythan estuary) .....*

I could see many more signatures of others who will, in due time, join my golden ranks. And it suddenly occurred to me - *here* sat these men and women of the past, yarning and laughing, eating and sleeping - and enjoying birds, but *none of them realised that they were becoming immortals.*

Perhaps that's what makes them so special?

Paul Heppleston

BOU Records Committee

The first 2 reintroduced populations of Red KItes now seem to be self sustaining. The species is to be admitted to Category C as well as A.

White-tailed Eagle has also been discussed. Scientists recently completed an analysis of the population dynamics of the Scottish birds. They concluded that further releases were advisable. The species does not yet seem to be self sustaining and no change to the present categorisation is anticipated. This will be reexamined in a couple of years.

Concern has been expressed to BOURC over how birders can decide the provenance of individual rare birds from species that occur both as escapes and as natural vagrants, eg Buffleheads, American Wigeon and many other species. BOURC assesses the credentials of species that are recorded for the first time. Subsequent records are assessed by BBRC. BOURC will discuss this matter with BBRC. It is recognised that there are many problems associated with this, not least the lack of information about the situation in many European countries. Efforts are being made to collaborate more closely with other European rarities committees in monitoring the status of birds in captivity, but the scale of the problem is large.

The question has been raised as to whether it is anachronistic for the BOU to publish a combined list for Britain and Ireland. It has even been suggested that the Irish are fed up with British birders visiting Ireland to add birds to their lists! In the forthcoming AERC European list, Britain and Ireland will be listed separately, as will the Channel Islands. BOURC is already reviewing the first British records of species where the first British and Irish record is from Ireland. The Committee will again discuss the issue of the combined list. It has been agreed that separate lists for Britain, as well as Britain and Ireland, will be published in future BOURC reports.

For further information contact

David Parkin, Department of Genetics, School of Medicine, Queen's Medical Centre, Nottingham NG7 2UH Tel: 0115-970-9399 (work) 0115-932-0090 (home)

Ian Dawson, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Sandy, Beds. SG19 2DL Tel: 0176-768-0551 (work)

The stuffers stuffing!

A Christmas lunch was held in the Library on 18th December as a small token of appreciation to the many members who willingly come in every quarter to do the boring job of stuffing envelopes with all the goodies you get throughout the year. The 24 members who managed to attend were thanked for all the work they have done over the last year by our President, Ian Darling, before tucking into a cold buffet and lots of wine. However, despite some very cheeky comments from the larger of your editors who, unfortunately, was unable to attend, nobody had to be carried out, although everybody seemed rather jolly by the middle of the afternoon! Needless to say not much office work was done that day (*nothing new there, larger ed*) but then we suppose one day a year may be acceptable.

We look forward to seeing you all again next year. Any new stuffers will be made welcome.

Staff outing

Can you guess what we saw? The first correct answer received at 21 Regent Terrace wins an SOC mug.

As we left the car, a **Skitterie mavie** was singing in a sycamore and a rare **Buntin** was calling from a telegraph wire. A **Croodlin doo** flapped away in alarm from the small forestry plantation. As we approached the cliff top we were met by the sounds - and smells - of the breeding **Tarrocks, Scoots, Sea Craas** and **Rednebbit Pussies.** A **Scarf** stood preening on the rocks below. As we watched, we were delighted to see a **Cock o' the Doos** (but pigeon fanciers are not!) disturbing a mixed flock of **Horse Cocks, Saandiloos** and **Pleeps** but with no success. Back at the car, the first **Latower** of the summer was seen.

Good luck!

Shelliefaw *Jim Young*

REVIEWS

A Guide to the Identification and Natural History of the Sparrows of the United States and Canada *by James D Rising, illustrated by David D Beadle. 1996. Academic Press, 353 pp. £30 hardback. ISBN 0-12-588970-4.*

Buntings and Sparrows: A Guide to the Buntings and North American Sparrows *by Clive Byers, Urban Olsson and Jon Curson. 1995. Pica Press. 333 pp. £28 hardback. ISBN 0-873403-19-4.*

At first glance these are 2 books which cover similar subjects, except that the Rising book restricts its coverage to the continent of North America. This means that Byers, Olsson and Curson will probably be most useful to a British or European birdwatcher. Even this book has an odd restriction in its coverage. South American species are only included if their genus is represented in North America but the rest of the world is covered. Both books have introductory chapters covering the general biology of the birds they cover and explanations of how the species accounts are laid out.

In both books the species accounts are well laid out, readable and as a result easy to use. One interesting feature of Rising is the section given on the history of the species from its discovery and including some information about population changes and the influence of European colonisation of North America. Personally, I found the species accounts more readable in Rising but Byers, Olsson and Curson gives more information about more species, as Rising's accounts of the Old World buntings which are vagrants to North America are less detailed than those for the sparrows. Another good feature of Rising is the easy to read colour distribution maps and the use of maps based on the North American Breeding Bird Survey. Byers, Olsson and Curson use monochrome maps which are easy enough to read but have less visual impact.

In any identification guide the plates are the most important feature. The main differences that I could find between the 2 books was that I preferred David Beadle's illustrations of the sparrows in Rising and Clive Byers' old world buntings were better than the few bunting plates in Rising. I can, however, find very few faults with either book and both would be a good buy, Rising if you will do a lot of birding in the US or Canada and Byers, Olsson and Curson if your birding will take you to many places.

David Kelly

Hobby

Steven Brown

Field Guide to the Birds of the Middle East *by R F Porter, S Christensen & P Schiermacker-Hansen, plates by A Birch, J Gale, M Langman & B Small, 1996. T & A D Poyser, Academic Press, London. 460 pp. £29.95 hardback. ISBN O-85661-076-3.*

I have always said that one can spot a high quality bird book from the first thumb through the pages. The latest volume from Poyser - passes the instant assessment test with flying colours and continues to impress under lengthier and more critical examination.

The authors acknowledge that this field guide has its origins in Poyser's earlier *Birds of the Middle East and North Africa.* That earlier book, though flawed and slightly quirky, took its rightful place as the standard identification text for the region. This volume, notwithstanding its lack of North African coverage, must surely now usurp that place.

The Middle East is the meeting point of the Palearctic, Afrotropical and Oriental faunas and the richness of its bird life reflects this. The book covers all 722 species recorded in the region up to the beginning of 1996. The first section of the book consists of excellent colour plates by 4 different artists with status, distribution and habitat information given on facing pages. The species texts in the second section contain full if concise descriptions and voice details with diagnostic identification features shown in italics. In an ideal world I would always like to have all the species information in one place but I must accept that this is as good a way as any of reconciling the perennial problem of how best to present each species without ending up with a book of unmanageable proportions. It is certainly a tribute to the book's design that over 700 species are fully covered within 460 pages and without unduly crowding any of the colour plates.

I do have a complaint with the price. I'm surprised that a field guide with commercial sponsorship - from Shell - costs £29.95. I'm also not convinced that the binding will stand up to heavy field use. Despite these niggles, this is definitely one to buy.

Keith Morton

The Historical Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland: 1875-1900 *by Simon Holloway. 1996. T & A D Poyser. 476 pp. £25 hardback. ISBN 0 85661 094 1.*

In this book, Simon Holloway presents the status and distribution of British breeding birds in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. He has drawn from a wealth of source material and the introductory sections themselves provide a useful and

interesting background to the subject. The informative and detailed species accounts, which also touch on changes caused by human and environmental factors, cover distribution and abundance for the period 1875-1900. This information, for most species, is put into context with the modern Atlases. The thoroughness of the text, however, is to a slight extent let down by the accompanying maps. Some of these cannot really be taken at face value since the information, as presented, gives quite misleading impressions. For example, the shading of the entire Tay Basin/Strathmore region indicates 'occasional' breeding for Hobby; in fact the text reveals that there has only been one definite breeding record in1887. This difficulty could have been avoided quite simply by the use of better graphics. Less importantly, the map colour tone differentiation is poor and a more accurate outline of the British Isles would have looked better.

However comprehensive the sources for a book of this type, it is inevitable that some pertinent references will be missed. One example is a review of the breeding birds of the Summer Isles by J B Dobbie (1899 Proc Roy Phys Soc Edinburgh 14: 46-47) which is much wider in scope than the Harvie-Brown paper on Priest Island listed in Appendix A.

Notwithstanding these minor misgivings, there is a wealth of information in this book and it can be recommended to anyone whose ornithological horizons are not restricted to the present.

Bob McGowan

A Guide to Scots Bird Names *by Robin Jackson and David Mitchell. 1996. Ptarmigan Press, 4 Deeview Gardens, Drumoak, Aberdeenshire, AB31 5AF. 64pp £4 softback. ISBN 1-872054-404*

This little book does not claim to provide a comprehensive list of Scots bird names; the authors appeal for more to be sent in and include space for additions. However it does include a great deal in 2 main sections: Scots - English and vice versa. There are also approximately 13 pages of discussion. The authors share an interest in Scots literature as well as birds. In case any readers are in doubt Scots means lowland Scots not Gaelic. I was surprised that the book gives no references to other works on bird names but it still seems a useful little volume.

Stan da Prato

Handbook of the Birds of the World Volume 3: Hoatzin to Auks *edited by Josep del Hove, Andrew Elliott, Jordi Sargatal. 1996. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. 821 pages. £105.00 ISBN 84-87334-20-2.*

This superb series marches on with the third volume maintaining the biannual publishing schedule. At 821 pages it is easily the largest so far and this is reflected in the ever growing list of contributors. The first volume had ten, the second 17 and this one no less than 33, and from all round the world. A new name among the artists is that of Chris Rose

The comparatively brief, though comprehensive, species texts are up to date and backed by a bibliography of c10,000 entries. They should, as in the previous volumes, be read in conjunction with the family accounts. These maintain the very high standard adopted from the start. Without being discursive, they cover a great deal of ground in a very readable form.

The many excellent colour photographs within the family accounts add enormously to the value of the whole work, including as they do aspects of behaviour, flight or nesting which complement the strictly formal poses plates. The colour printing is of the high standard that has come to be expected from Spanish printers. Although the artists' names appear in the list of plates at the beginning of the work, it would have been nice to have had them added to each plate caption as well; they all deserve full recognition for their fine work

I now look forward to Volume 4. If you haven't started to collect this series, then do so, at once. Over £100 might seem a lot of money for a book but it is only once every 2 years and represents little more than 4 or 5 bottles of Islay's finest malt whisky. It will give just as much pleasure and last far longer.

Malcolm Ogilvie

We are grateful to Malcolm both for reviewing the book and letting us know how much whisky he drinks in a year!

Eds.

Other books received

Rare Birds Day by Day, *Dudley & Benton. Academic Press 1996, £25.00 ISBN*

Library News

Library open day

This was held on 23 November, 1996. The turn out was disappointing as only 6 members, one of whom was our new President, attended.

Journals etc for sale

We have a large selection of back numbers of British and overseas journals, reports, magazines, etc., for sale. Please send details of your requirements, or an sae for a summary list to **The Librarian, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT or Fax 0131 558 9947.**

Reviews

We average one page of review per issue - on the one hand they encourage publishers to send us books for the library but most members don't want too many - this issue has more as promised articles did not arrive.

MEMBERS' REQUESTS

Wing tagged Red Kites and Sea Eagles

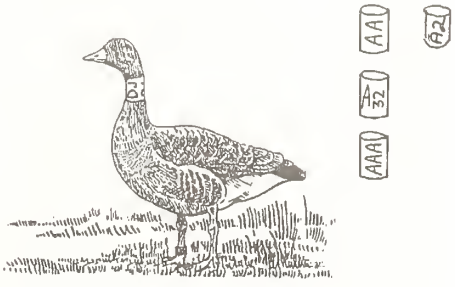
see *SBN* 40: pages 3 & 14

Wing tagged Hen Harriers, Colour ringed Ring Ouzels, Colour ringed Stonechats, Colour ringed Mute Swans and Colour ringed Reed Buntings

see *SBN* 43: page 15

Colour marked Greylag Geese

Sightings of Greylags bearing dye marks, darvic rings or neck collars, together with details of colours and letters seen, no matter how incomplete, should be sent to: **Brian Etheridge, Morven, Station Road, Avoch, Ross-shire, IV9 8RW. Telephone 01381 620098 (home) or 01463 715000 (work).**



This is DJ - collars should be read from the bottom up.

SOC NOTICES

200 Club

Winners in the fourth quarter of 1996 were:

October - £30 G Lee, Edinburgh; 2nd £20 A Anderson, Newburgh; 3rd £10 Miss N Henderson, Edinburgh.
November - £100 M Shave, Christchurch; 2nd £75 S Jackson, Falmouth; 3rd £50 Capt J Owen, Melrose; 4th £30 Mrs M Livingston, Edinburgh; 5th £20 Mrs J Kinnear, Harrogate; 6th £10 Mrs M Castle, Ayr.
December - £30 C McLellan, Peebles; 2nd £20 Mrs M Draper, Glasgow; 3rd £10 B Pirie, Aberdeen.

In the 200 Club's eighth year, which finishes at the end of May, some £1,100 was given to the SOC to complete the replacement of old night store heaters and pay for most of the new projection equipment; the small balance will be paid next June. By the year end, a similar sum will have been returned to its members in prizes. This is again an increase, due to continued support and a very welcome addition to membership which, at the time of writing - December 1996 - stands at 186. Members' support is greatly appreciated and welcomed by Council. Over £14,000 has been raised with some £7,000 going to the SOC and a similar sum being returned to its members in monthly prizes ranging from £100 to £10. Well done and thank you!

The 200 Club's ninth year starts on 1 June, 1997 and renewal notices to existing members who pay by cheque or cash will be sent out in April. If you would like to join, or take out another membership, please write to me enclosing a cheque for £12, payable to 'SOC 200 Club'. This will cover the 12 months from 1 June, and will be acknowledged. If you would like to pay by Bankers Order, please contact me and I will send you a form. **Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL. (Tel. 01896 822176).**

Thanks to

Thanks are once again due to the many willing volunteers who come in every quarter and stuff envelopes. The stuffers for the December mailing were: Bob & Betty Smith, Sue Goode, Noreen Stabler, Joan Wilcox, Rosemary Davidson, Frank Hamilton, Peter Vandome, Joan Wilcox, Geoffrey Harper, John & Elisabeth Law, Keith Macgregor, Ethel Russell, Phyllis Barrie and Angus & Chris Smith.

Printing problems with Scottish Birds

All of our publications are now produced using a desk top system whereby staff at Regent Terrace prepare the material that goes to the printer on a computer disc. The savings on the previous system where we paid the printer to set the articles have allowed us to expand our range of publications. We are concerned that in the December 1996 issue of *Scottish Birds* (18:4) parts of page 207 in Adam Watson's paper on Gulls and Crows in the Cairngorms had been omitted. Checking reveals that the disc did contain the page in full. We are still investigating how this happened and why the reproduction of some photographs was disappointing. A correction will be published in *Scottish Birds* in June 1997. In the meantime, anyone who wants a print out of the complete paper should write to Sylvia at 21 Regent Terrace.

Black & White photos and artwork requests

We are always on the lookout for new artwork or photographs to enhance our publications. If you can draw and would like to see your work in your Club publications then why not send some into us? Already this year we have received artwork from Derek Robertson and Frances Godfrey to whom we are very grateful.

Slides

We are setting up a slide collection for SOC use. If anybody has spare, duplicate or unwanted slides of birds, habitats etc in Scotland they would be gladly received. Fred Westcott has already started off our collection with a generous donation and we are very grateful to him.

Intimate secrets

Do you have any old cotton sheets you no longer need? If curious then please tell Sylvia or Pamela on **0131 556 6042** (much cheaper than 0898 numbers) about your dirty, or preferably clean washing and find out why we want them!

Dumfries & Galloway Bird Report 1995

Just published, available from **J E Howie, 60 Main Street, St. John's Town of Dalry, Kirkcudbrightshire DG7 3UW** Price £2.60. Back numbers also available.

Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club. It is published 4 times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices need to be sent to the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace no later than 5 weeks before publication. The magazine acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and to disseminate information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. The views expressed in articles in *Scottish Bird News* are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication. The SOC also publishes the journal *Scottish Birds* which publishes original papers and notes on Scottish Ornithology and the *Scottish Bird Report*. For details of these publications and membership contact the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

Birds - original colour slides
SAE for current list and prices to:-
Vanellus Presentations,
44 Southgrove Road, Sheffield S10 2NQ Tel (0114) 2664362

Seal sightings

Grey Seal pups from the Isle of May have been tagged by the Sea Mammal Research Unit. The yellow, orange and pink 'hats' have been individually numbered and any sightings of live or dead animals will be welcomed by:- **Ailsa Hall, SMRU, University of St Andrews, School of Biological & Medical Sciences, Queens Terr, St. Andrews. KY16 9TS.** If you find a dead seal and return the plastic 'hat' you can claim a reward! The colour of the 'hat' is linked to the size of the pup when marked.

Discussion Group 1997

The South East Scotland Discussion Group meets monthly in the Library at 21 Regent Terrace to talk about fieldwork, surveys and local conservation issues. All members are welcome to attend. Meetings start at 7.30 pm and are normally on the first Wednesday of the month apart from the summer. The dates for the rest of 1997 are: 2 April, 3 September, 1 October, 5 November and 3 December.

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BIRD

THE SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Scottish Bird News

JUNE 1997 No. 46
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Edited by Stan da Prato
Assisted by Pamela Black, Sylvia Laing and Joan Wilcox

SMITHSONIAN
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LIBRARIES

Undercover investigations

Persecution of birds of prey has been going on for years. When these birds gained legal protection the hope was that this, combined with a growing awareness of their value as part of the environment, would lead to the eventual elimination of persecution. Most of our readers realise that has not happened. However, gaining evidence of illegal persecution is not easy. A programme shown during April 1997 on Channel 4's Countryside Undercover series was remarkable for its success in recording on video tape some of the illegal activities carried out by egg collectors, gamekeepers and landowners.

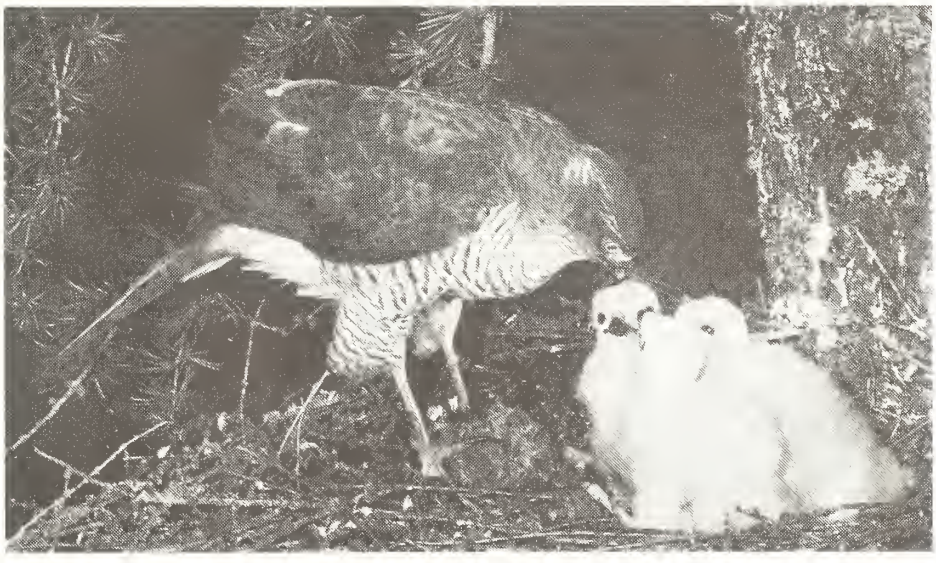
Independent investigator

The programme was presented by David Braithwaite, a raptor enthusiast who decided to mount his own investigation - he does not work for any conservation body - to show some of the persecution which is still affecting our birds of prey. He started with a visit to a police station in Yorkshire where an egg collector had recently been successfully prosecuted. The collector in question, Jim Whitaker, was fined £1,480 for having over 100 eggs in his possession, including Peregrine, Golden Eagle, Rough-legged Buzzard, Kite and Merlin. By posing as an egg collector he gained Whitaker's confidence. Whitaker is also a book seller dealing in specialist books for eggers, including one on Red Kites. Whitaker then went on to show photographs of a Red Kite nest site which he admitted he had been to in the past. He also confirmed that a new book for egg collectors is being published giving sites of endangered species in the New Forest. It includes 4 figure grid references for sites of Honey Buzzard, Montagu's Harrier, Hobby, Stone Curlew, Nightjar, Cetti's Warbler, Dartford Warbler, Hawfinch, Crossbill and Firecrest. Whitaker remarked that there are only 7 known pairs of Montagu's Harriers nesting in Britain and details of 4 of these are being published. Unfortunately, no law exists against publishing these books.

Whitaker also said that he is "at war with the law", and "has been watched" during his frequent trips to Scotland.

Illegal traps

David Braithwaite then visited an estate in Lancashire and showed viewers a pole trap. This type of trap was, of course, outlawed in 1954. Following a visit to another estate in Somerset a video was taken showing the gamekeeper rigging a pole trap. This keeper was successfully prosecuted but only fined £200.



Hen Sparrowhawk with young *Bobby Smith*

Raptor killing

The recent call for a change in the law to allow the killing of raptors was the basis for the next part of the programme. David Hendry, a landowner, was interviewed. He said that the law should be changed, and that the responsibility for the control of raptors should lie with gamekeepers! A nameless keeper interviewed did admit that he had not used poison for many years as it was "a bit dodgy". If he needed to remove a bird it was far easier to shoot it.

Stewart Scull, of the British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC), said that keepers found guilty of breaking the law were expelled from the organisation. This is a standard response which does not appear to have much effect on the number of times the law is actually flouted.

Scottish landowner

Braithwaite then posed as a travel agent acting for a foreign shooting party and went to see John Drysdale, the Scottish Landowners' Federation (SLF) representative on the government working group on birds of prey. Drysdale happily stated that, while he could put up with one pair of raptors he could not put up with 5, and it was important to remove them before they could do the most damage. He went on to explain, and demonstrate a new type of trap which, according to him 'has been used in Wales and is legal' He called the trap in question a catch alive net trap which he said was legal for Crows, but if you catch anything else you let it go.

Red Kite *RSPB*

Drysdale jokingly commented that if a raptor was caught "accidentally" he would get a box and transport the bird to Perth to let it go. He said he had bought 5 of these traps; one each for himself and his 4 keepers. After leaving Mr Drysdale, Braithwaite visited Police Wildlife Liaison Officer Steve Downing who, on viewing the video, said that the trap was illegal, whether the birds caught in it are released or not.

Scottish eagles

David Braithwaite's next visit was to see Mike Dawson, who publishes books for egg collectors giving many sites of protected species. Dawson was keen to encourage Braithwaite to collate information about 10 of the 17 known White-tailed Eagle sites in Scotland giving 6 figure grid references. Dawson admitted that he knew of a White-tailed Eagle nest being robbed in Scotland last year. If true, this is the first known robbery from the introduced birds. With Dawson, he headed for Perthshire and a remote Golden Eagle site using changed identities; it is easy to get credit cards issued under false names. Dawson pointed out this particular eyrie to Braithwaite and admitted he had tried to rob the site but, fortunately, for the eagle, had failed.

The publishing of these books, which are only bought by egg collectors, should be outlawed. Following his remarkable programme David Braithwaite is sending all the information gained during his research to the appropriate authorities. We await the results with interest.

Sylvia Laing

More bias

The March *SBN* devoted some space to the extraordinary campaign against the RSPB waged by the *Telegraph* papers. More recently, a piece in the *Sunday Times (23 March 1997)* covering the controversy over the proposed funicular railway on Cairn Gorm can hardly be described as neutral. The journalist, Joan McAlpine, made her views, and presumably those of her paper, clear with comments such as 'The power of the conservation lobby is reflected elsewhere in the Highlands, effectively prizing wild life above people. Compromise is not something British environmentalists appear to understand, especially in the Highlands'.

Ms McAlpine's unrealistic claims about the state of Scotland's mountains '273 out of the 277 Munros remain in a virgin state' and her apparent failure to understand that the ecology of the Cairngorms is different to the Alps come through strongly. Locals are quoted as being generally against the 'conservationists' who are mostly dismissed as outsiders: 'a Scottish accent is a rarity'. Nothing is said about the economics of the scheme.

There is no reference in the *Sunday Times* to the fact that some of the strongest opposition to the railway has come, not from naturalists, but walkers, climbers and cross country skiers. The alternative proposals to put in a high speed gondola are not mentioned. A gondola system has been installed on Aonach Mor, near Fort William, without the conflict that has dogged the Cairn Gorm proposals.

Stan da Prato

More Red Kites

Red Kites have been successfully introduced back into the north of Scotland in recent years. A similar scheme has now been launched further south. Nineteen young Red Kites from Germany were released in August 1996 from a Central Scotland site as part of a 5 year project.

All released birds are fitted with small tail mounted radio transmitters to track their movements. Each bird is also marked with small coloured tags on its upper wings. Eight of the birds settled near the release area for the entire winter. These individuals fed mostly on dead sheep, Rabbits and road killed Pheasants.

One kite travelled over 400 miles to winter near Paignton in Devon. A second kite, following a tour of Helensburgh and Glasgow city centre, headed across the Irish Sea to County Antrim. Other birds visited Biggar, Ballantrae, Cumbria and north Yorkshire. A bird tracked to Castle Kennedy, Stranraer, was found to be using the same roost and feeding sites as Red Kites from the earlier reintroduction programme in north Scotland.

For further information contact: **Lorcan O'Toole, Red Kite project officer - 0141 924 5522**

More details on the Red Kite project will appear in the annual Raptor Round Up in due course.

Go ahead for funicular plan

At the end of March it was revealed that the £17 million Cairn Gorm funicular plan had won planning permission from Highland Council. The plan can now no longer be called in by the Scottish Secretary, which many conservationists had hoped would happen. The planning permission allows the developers to apply formally for funding. Around £3 million is being sought from the European Objective 1 fund. The funicular has failed to attract Millennium funds and an appeal is also being made for lottery money.

Highland Council's Convener, Peter Peacock, said "This is a major step forward and takes us to the next stage which is to secure cash for the investment.

The Scottish Director of RSPB has called for the new government to reverse permission. We shall see.

Eviction for wildlife claims

According to press reports, tenant farmers have been threatened with eviction to make way for wild birds and animals while landowners have rejected accusations that they are preparing for a new wave of Highland Clearances.

Captain Alwyn Farquharson, who runs Invercauld Estate, is trying to evict Jean Lindsay from a 2,500 acre hill farm in Glenshee, allegedly to make way for a wildlife habitat. The Earl of Airlie has started action to clear Norman Ogg, a non resident farmer, from a 125 acre plot on his Perthshire estate in order to improve cover for Pheasants.

Hill farming and nature conservation are not incompatible, and landlords who use this as an excuse to clear tenant farmers are probably disguising their real purpose.

Conservationists, who have argued for a cut in the number of sheep and deer in Scotland, say overgrazing has hit grouse numbers harder than has predation by birds of prey. 'There is no conservation advantage in having fewer hill farmers' said David Minns of the RSPB 'what we have said for years is that a change in support schemes is needed to encourage farmers to reduce grazing pressure'.

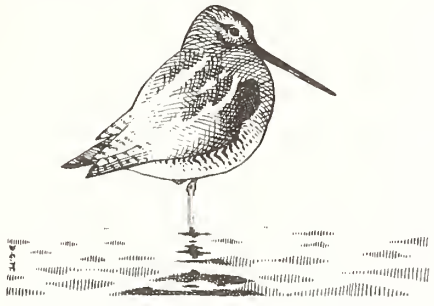
David Laird, factor of Airlie Estates and chairman of the Cairngorm Partnership, said a balance must be maintained between wildlife and farming interests. 'Hill farming should be compatible with conservation, but we must have regard to the enormous amount of damage that has been done by overgrazing'.

The Scottish Landowners Federation has denied that recent cases were the start of a flood of Highland evictions.

In an unusual twist to the story, Maasai people from Tanzania, who are touring Scotland, say that land ownership laws in Scotland are no better than those in third world countries, which leave farmers and villagers open to exploitation and eviction.

One Maasai commented 'I find it amazing that, despite all the knowledge and democratic experience in this country you still have huge parts of your country, which are kept only for hunting and there are no people. In Laggan, we met a community that is trying to raise money to buy the forest so they can control their destiny - that is no different to the struggle we have. In Scotland you can say something and be heard, not like us. Why do you not do anything?'

The Maasai are angry that conservation bodies are removing native farmers and turning the land into game reserves. One said 'We are conservationists. We know how to look after the wild animals. When we left our land there were 500 Rhinos, now there are none'.



Snipe *Dave Mitchell*

Highland waste strategy

SNH has called on Highland Council to develop its waste strategy as a matter of priority. The call is linked to re notification of the Longman and Castle Stuart Bays, outside Inverness, as an SSSI. The site was first notified in September 1995 because of nationally important numbers of up to 9,500 ducks and waders in winter. However, part of Longman Bay is also used for dumping waste material. Following discussion with Highland Council, SNH decided to postpone confirmation of the site and restart the notification process in 1997, so that a long term waste disposal strategy for the Highlands could be progressed. Jeff Watson, SNH North West Regional Director, thinks good progress has been made with Highland Council on the strategy.

The existing landfill area at the Longman will be full in less than 10 years, and the question of where waste from around the Highlands will be managed in the next millennium still remains open. The Inverness Local Plan states that proposals for further tipping at the Longman cannot be considered until a waste strategy has been completed. SNH has made it clear that any extension of the existing Longman site onto the mudflats would destroy the feeding grounds upon which large numbers of birds depend, and has urged the Council to identify other options so that the Longman area is not selected by default. SNH also says that the SSSI notification is a formal recognition of the important features of the site; it does not necessarily rule out development.

Charles Frank

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Charles Frank
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Bird watching in Easter Ross

The Highlands offer supberb scenery, at least when the weather and the midges allow you to enjoy it. The area is also rich in wildlife. In this article, SOC Council member Bob Swann suggests some good places to see birds, and other creatures, in Easter Ross, an area that has a variety of habitats and, compared to the west coast, a relatively low rainfall.

Heading north from Inverness up the A9 you cross the Kessock Bridge and you are immediately into Ross-shire. Head up to the Tore roundabout, keeping a look out for soaring Buzzards or Kites, and then strike east along the A832 and you will eventually arrive at a large car park at the head of Munlochy Bay. It's another good spot to watch Kites and you can scope the bay, although you are still quite a distance from it. In late autumn the fields around here can have good flocks of Greylag Geese. Continue along the main road and you will eventually reach Fortrose. From the centre of town turn right down to Chanonry Ness. The car park by the lighthouse is a good birding spot. Sea watches can reveal skuas, all 4 species are regular, and shearwaters in late summer and autumn, especially after north easterly winds In winter you can get excellent views of Long-tailed Ducks, divers and auks. At high tide, large numbers of Dunlin, Ringed Plover and Turnstone roost around the point. In summer it's an excellent site to watch Bottle-nosed Dolphins.

Moving on

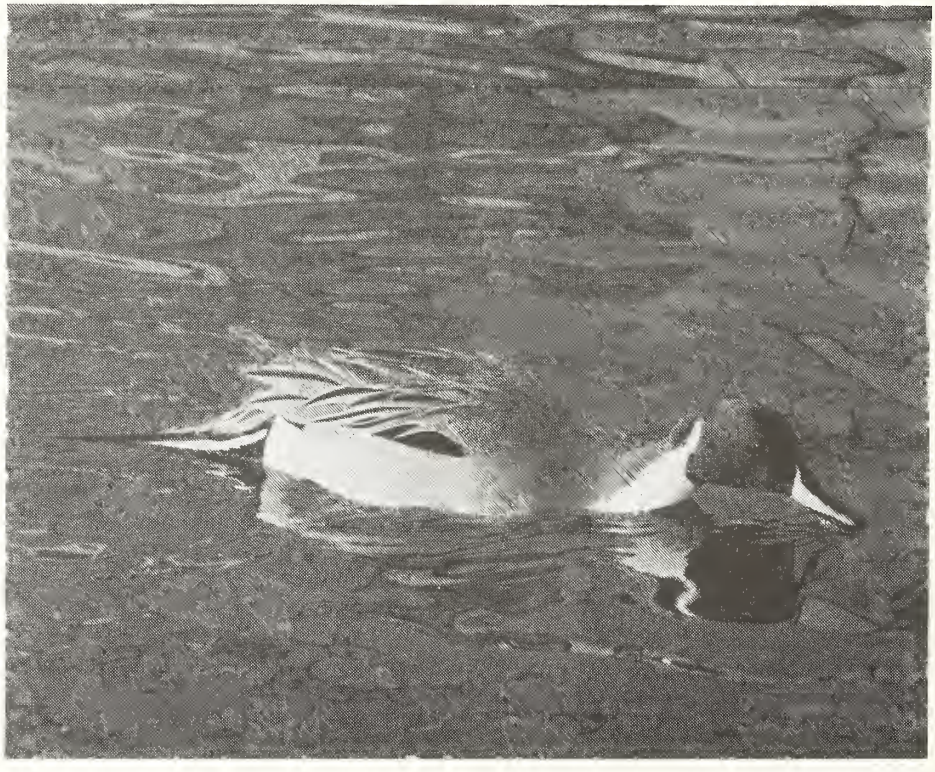
Moving on from Fortrose you reach Rosemarkie. The road turns left and starts to follow a steep valley known as the Fairy Glen. This is a small woodland RSPB reserve. A path leads up it from a small car park. It has a wide range of the usual woodland passerines and Dippers breed along the river. At the time of writing an Eagle Owl has taken up residence! Fulmars nest on the steep upper slopes of the glen. The A832 continues north to Cromarty, passing through plantations and then large open fields, which can hold large numbers of Greylag and Pink-footed Geese in late winter and spring. Park your car at the harbour in Cromarty and walk east along the beach, looking out to the Sutors of Cromarty. In winter you can get excellent views of Long-tailed Ducks, Eiders, divers and Red-breasted Mergansers offshore. In summer terns and dolphins are the main attraction. Cruise boats operate from Cromarty which almost guarantee sightings of Bottle-nosed Dolphins in summer and also give you excellent views of the seabird colonies on the North Sutor with nesting Guillemots, Razorbills, Kittiwakes, Shags, Fulmars and, if you are lucky, Black Guillemots. It is also one of Scotland's largest Cormorant colonies with about 250 nesting pairs.

Waders and ducks

From Cromarty you can head back down the B9163 along the south side of the Cromarty Firth. It's worth stopping just before Jemimaville and scanning the firth as Slavonian Grebes and Scaup regularly winter here. The best site for waders and dabbling duck is the RSPB hide which you will find at the side of the road at Udale Bay. Arrive here just before the high tide and you will witness large flocks of Oystercatcher, Redshank, Curlew, Dunlin, Knot and Bar-tailed Godwit all assembling to roost on the saltmarsh across the river in front of the hide, as well as large numbers of feeding Wigeon. It's also an excellent spot to see geese in late autumn and spring. Carry along the road to a T junction, turn right and follow the signs to New hall Point. This gives you good views of the north side of the bay. The hawthorn hedges are very good for winter thrushes, finches and buntings and, as you pass Newhall Point, it's worth scanning the firth for Goldeneye and other ducks.

Complete the loop back onto the B9163 and head west back down the Black Isle to the Cromarty Bridge. Cross the bridge and head back north up the A9. If it is low tide it is often worth stopping in the first layby to scan the mud flats for ducks and waders. Common Seals haul out on the rocks.

The road heads north passed Alness Bay, another good wader and Wigeon site in winter. Turn of the A9 and follow the B817 to Invergordon. This road follows the north shore of the Cromarty Firth and gives you lots of opportunities to stop and scan the firth. The B817 eventually rejoins the A9 at Kildary but it is worth leaving it straight away and following the minor road to Arrabella . The fields around here can hold hundreds of Pink-footed Geese and large herds of Whooper Swans while Buzzards and Sparrowhawks hunt overhead. Turn right at Arrabella and follow the B9175 round towards Nigg Bay. The road gets very close to the bay and, at high tide, gives excellent views of vast flocks of a wide range of wintering ducks and waders. It is a particularly good site for Pintail, with over 200 birds regularly wintering. In spring the saltmarshes and surrounding fields often hold thousands of Pink-footed Geese.



Drake Pintail *Sidney Clarke*

Osprey *Artist unknown*

Further along the road an old RAF observation tower can be an excellent viewpoint for the entire bay, Peregrines, Buzzards and Kestrels regularly hunt in front of the tower. Flocks of Linnets and Yellowhammers feed amongst the gorse, while small Twite flocks can still be found out on the saltmarsh. Follow the road round to Nigg Ferry. In summer terns and Ringed Plovers nest on the reclaimed land round the oil terminal and broods of Eiders and Mergansers can be seen feeding just offshore. Nigg Ferry is a good spot for a bit of Firth watching at any time of year, with dolphins and terns in summer and seaducks in winter.

Ospreys and Otters

Head back to Arrabella and turn right towards Hill of Fearn, where you should turn left following the B9165 towards Tain. After crossing the railway at Fearn Station, turn right and follow the minor road till you come alongside Loch Eye. The loch is probably at its best at dusk in late autumn when thousands of geese and hundreds of Whooper Swans come into roost. Duck numbers are highly variable and the large size of the loch makes close viewing difficult though, during strong south westerly winds, large numbers often gather at the SW end of the loch. In late summer it is a good site for fishing Ospreys and Otters.

Seawatching

Follow the minor road past the cross roads to a T junction. You can now go east heading for Portmahomack and Tarbat Ness. Around the lighthouse is a good place for seawatching, especially in late summer and autumn after north easterly gales. Huge numbers of Gannets, Kittiwakes and auks, with smaller numbers of shearwaters and skuas, can be seen. It's a particularly good spot for Little Auks after strong northerly winds. It is also the best autumn migration site in the area, though the conditions have to be just right with a strong ENE - NE wind. Warblers, Redstarts, Pied Flycatchers are regular with the occasional rarity like a Black Redstart, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Red-backed Shrike, Wryneck or Rosefinch.

Ducks and whisky

Follow the road back into Tain and head west along the A9 towards the Dornoch Bridge. As you pass Glenmorangie distillery (always worth a visit) the road comes close to the south side of the Dornoch Firth. From late September to early December this is an excellent area for ducks with several thousand Wigeon and hundreds of Teal feeding just off shore. Both Blue-winged and Green-winged Teal have turned up in recent years. In summer it is another good spot to look for fishing Ospreys.

Heading home

If it's summer head home by continuing west along the old A9 towards Ardgay. The Mere at mid Fearn is worth a quick look for Tufted Duck, Goosander, Red-breasted Merganser or Osprey. Turn sharp left up a steep road that takes you over the Struie. The laybys at the top give panoramic views of the Dornoch Firth and Kyle of Sutherland and are a good place to scan for raptors and Ravens. Head on over the Struie looking out for Short-eared Owls and Hen Harriers, especially as you drop into Strath Rory, where they often hunt over the old glacial melt water channels. There is a car park by the river in Strathrory where you can walk up stream, accompanied by Common Sandpipers and wagtails. It's also a good spot for Adders! The main road will eventually take you back onto the A9 just passed Alness.

By doing this loop you have missed out on the pine woods and plantations which stretch south from Tain towards Scotsburn. They hold the usual woodland species along with small numbers of Crossbills, Crested Tits and Capercaillies. The forest walk at Glen Aldie, just south of Tain, makes a good starting point. Pine Martens are plentiful in these woods, though you are more likely to see their distinctive droppings than the animals themselves.

I have missed out the glens like Strath Rusdale and Glen Glass. As well as being scenic they hold good numbers of birds. There is always a chance of seeing Peregrine, Osprey or even Golden Eagle. The woods in summer are home to Redstarts, Tree Pipits and Wood Warblers.

Easter Ross is a superb birding area at any time of year. In a fairly small area there are a wide variety of habitats supporting a large number of species. Even on farm land many species, like Grey Partridge. Skylark, Linnet. Yellowhammer and Tree Sparrow, which are in severe decline elsewhere, still remain abundant. Corn Bunting and Quail are still found in small numbers each year. Bird watching at any time of year will not disappoint you and you may well find that, at many of these sites, you are the sole birder. As usual, always try and keep disturbance to a minimum and, if you do come across any thing unusual, please inform our local recorder who is **Colin Crooke, 6 George Street, Avoch, Ross-shire IV9 8PU.**

Bob Swann

Seabird conference in Glasgow

From 22-24 November 1996, 105 delegates from 18 countries attended an international symposium on Seabirds in the Marine Environment at Glasgow University. The event was sponsored by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and the Seabird Group. As this brief account shows the conference gave an excellent overview of many current issues in seabird research.

The opening address was delivered by the President of ICES, Alain Maucorps. He outlined the role and remit of ICES, which includes coordinating research and providing advice on marine issues. Research on seabirds, for example, informs advice on the interactions between seabird populations and fisheries, advice that stems from an ICES working group on seabird ecology.

The role of seabirds

The symposium focused on the role of seabirds as an integral component of marine ecosystems. An entirely natural system was examined by George Hunt, who studied Least Auklet feeding strategies and how these appear to be governed by oceanographic features. Other speakers reported on the role of seabirds as scavengers of fishery discards from fishing boats. From estimates of the weight of discarded fish, and knowledge of seabird consumption rates of these, it is possible to predict the number of seabirds that are supported by this food source. Several speakers speculated on the impact for seabird communities if discards are removed from the food chain. In one case Daniel Oro showed how the globally rare Audouin's Gull around the Ebro delta uses discards to a large extent. This has led to an unusual conflict in conservation terms as the gulls are dependent on local trawlers over exploiting the marine environment. In contrast, Kees Camphuysen questioned the importance of fisheries discards in the diet of Fulmars, saying that it should not be overestimated in the absence of data on natural food resources. He also pointed out that Fulmars were more abundant in areas of the North Sea where the supply of fisheries waste is low, and that hydrography and related factors may be more important factors influencing Fulmar distribution. He estimated that less than 50% of current numbers of Fulmars can be fully supported by fisheries in the North Sea. Keith Hamer spoke about diet studies of Fulmars at the 2 largest Fulmar colonies in the U K , Foula and St Kilda. He showed that Fulmars on Foula rely more on discards which is related to the presence of whitefish trawlers in the area.

While these speakers highlighted how fisheries can be beneficial to seabirds in terms of supplying an easily exploited food source, Mike Harris showed that this is not always the case. In a study of Kittiwakes on the Isle of May over the past 11 years, he has shown that breeding success depends on the proportion of Sandeels in the diet of chicks. Kittiwakes from the colony forage over the Wee Bankie where there is a Sandeel fishery. The years when most Sandeels have been landed have seen the lowest breeding success in Kittiwakes.

Kittiwake *Jim Young*

Energetics

Essential to the understanding of seabird fisheries interactions is a thorough understanding of the energetics of seabirds. Several speakers examined the difficulties of estimating even the basal metabolic rate (BMR) of seabird species, without having to add the complexities of the energetics of seabirds at sea in ever changing environmental conditions. This was emphasised by Ommo Hüppop, who attempted to look at the changes in BMR during different activities, highlighting the differences between his results and those of other workers in this field.

A different approach to examining seabird distributions was adopted by other speakers in a session devoted to studies of the scale dependence of seabird distribution Seabird dispersion patterns may occur, or may be detectable, only at certain scales and, similarly, the ecological processes driving these patterns may also operate at discrete scales. Unless analyses that attempt to highlight the associations between seabird distribution and features of their habitat are undertaken at different and appropriate scales then such associations may well go undetected. Papers by Jim Reid and Graham Begg focused on novel methods of exploring scale dependence and Peter Wright applied the principle comparing the distributions of Guillemots and their Sandeel prey

Modelling

Another important aspect of the conference was several demonstrations of how modelling is being used to predict seabird distribution. These included relatively simple models such as that used in the application of a geographical information system (GIS) to Shag foraging by Sarah Wanless. Combining GIS and radio telemetry, Sarah related Shag distribution in the Moray Firth to substrate type and found that Shags preferred feeding over sandy substrates. A more complex energetic model, based on gut contents and their depletion over time, was applied to Kittiwake distribution in the North Sea by John Ollason. The success of these models in accounting for seabird distribution patterns varies and depends largely on the quality of the data on which they are built. This is a field where there is undoubtedly a growing level of interest,

however, and we can rely on seeing better, more accurate models in the future as methods are refined.

Environmental monitors

Bob Furness gave an informative talk on seabirds as monitors in the marine environment. For example, seabirds may be used to monitor pollution. Birds expel mercury through their feathers and relative mercury levels in the oceans may thus be measured by examining seabird feathers. Pelagic seabirds feeding primarily on mesopelagic prey have been found to have the highest levels of mercury. This is due to a process of mercury methylation in deep water that renders uptake by fish easy.

A round table discussion on a BirdLife International Global Seabird Project highlighted concerns about the serious threat to seabirds from fishing with long lines. It was proposed that reducing the threat of long lining to seabird populations should be the focus of a project led by a fulltime officer based in the southern hemisphere.

Between talks, there was the opportunity to read over 30 well presented poster displays and to browse and spend money in the second hand and antiquarian book shop set up by David Wilson. A tricky quiz, compiled by Martin Heubeck, attracted a large number of entries. Mike Harris won first prize but he got one wrong! Three members of the JNCC Seabirds and Cetaceans Team were joint runners up. Collusion was strongly suspected here but not proved. The conference dinner on the Saturday night was well attended and there was live ceilidh music afterwards. However, the expected (as predicted by recent models) abundance of hangovers on the Sunday morning reflected a disturbingly low foraging efficiency after leaving the dinner!

Congratulations

Congratulations are due to the steering committee of Kees Camphuysen, Bob Furness, George Hunt, Jim Reid and Mark Tasker for a successful conference, especially to Jim for putting together an interesting and varied programme and Bob for ensuring that things ran smoothly at the conference venue. Thanks are due to the speakers and the presenters of the poster displays; the high quality of both will challenge those of us who have to follow their lead at future conferences. Thanks also go to Esso for financial support and to the sponsors of the quiz, Colin Baxter Photography, William Grant Distillers International, Shetland Knitwear Associates, Shetland Salmon Farmers Association and Walkers Shortbread Ltd. The Symposium Proceedings will appear as a special issue of the *ICES Journal of Marine Science.*

Richard White and Claire Pollock

Thar she - or he - strands!

The circumstances which led to the death of Moby, the name the media inevitably gave to a male Sperm Whale that finally stranded and died near Kincardine Bridge after swimming into the Forth, was only the latest in a growing number of strandings. According to the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, 22 Sperm Whales, 19 of them alive, have been stranded on Scottish shores in the past 2 years. This compares with only 12 Sperm Whales reported stranded in the whole of the UK from 1913 until 1966.

The Society say that Sperm Whale numbers off the UK and Ireland are thought to be similar to those off the east coast of North America, though no similar increase in strandings has been reported there. One theory is that cetaceans may be led ashore because they are navigating using the earth's magnetic field. Analysis of UK live strandings carried out at Cambridge University found that they occur where lines of equal magnetic force meet the coastline perpendicularly. The animals may be misled by these abnormalities and follow them ashore.

Male Sperm Whales normally migrate along a route from feeding grounds around Norway to meet the smaller females around the Azores. While trying to follow a deep channel to the west of the British Isles, the males can take a wrong turning and end up in the shallower waters of the North Sea.

It could be that stocks of food are attracting them into the North Sea. Small numbers of Sperm Whales have always been washed ashore. The increase in strandings may reflect a rise in the population since they have been protected from whaling. A third increasingly popular belief is that seismic explorations for oil around Shetland using explosive charges and hydrophones are driving the whales away from their traditional routes, though scientific proof of this is, so far, lacking.

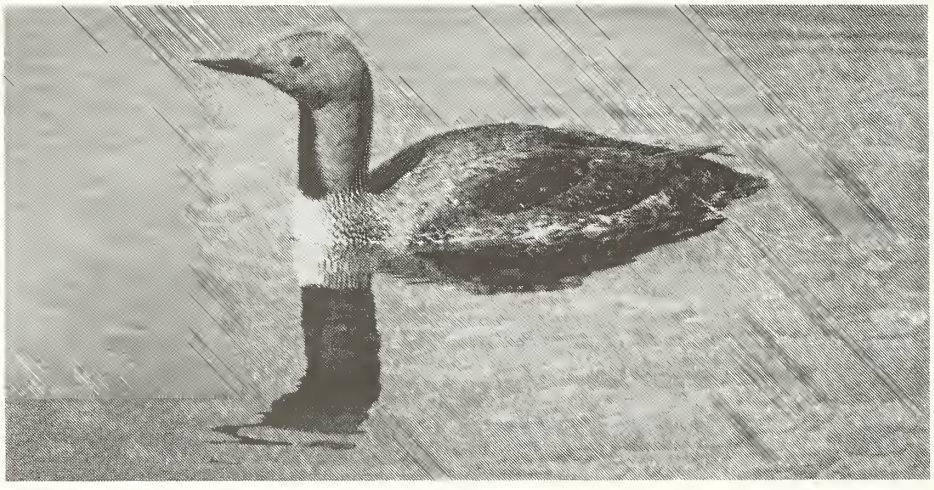
More whales out there?

Though most birdwatchers, especially those addicted to sea watching, like to see cetaceans, actual sightings of the larger whales are infrequent. Evidence that suggests there are more out there, at least to the west of Scotland, comes from US military equipment designed to track Soviet submarines during the Cold War. Information from listening devices on the sea bed is now available to biologists. Apparently it is possible to identify the species of whale from its sonar pattern and, according to a recent report on Radio Scotland's *Out of Doors* programme, Fin, Humpback and Blue Whales are commoner in deep waters west of the Hebrides than previously thought.

Fulmar *Arthur Gilpin*

Twenty years of counting seabirds in Shetland

This summer sees the 20th year of the Shetland Oil Terminal Environmental Advisory Group's (SOTEAG) seabird monitoring programme in Shetland. After several years of base line work in the mid 1970s by the then Nature Conservancy Council and the Sullom Voe Environmental Advisory Group (SOTEAG's predecessor), a year round programme of seabird studies began in 1978 with the aim of monitoring any adverse effects of the siting and operation of the Sullom Voe Oil Terminal, and its associated tanker traffic, on seabirds in Shetland. The work and SOTEAG have been funded by the Sullom Voe Association Ltd and carried out by the University of Aberdeen, until 1995 under the guidance of the late Professor George Dunnet.



Red-throated Diver *William Paton*

Essential elements

Although the programme has evolved over the years, the essential elements remain as they were in 1978 : (I) to maintain up to date information on numbers and population trends of the seabird species most vulnerable to oil pollution, (2) to monitor levels of chronic oil pollution around Shetland generally, and (3) to assess the impact of particular oil spills on seabird populations, and to maintain contingency plans for dealing with the wildlife aspects of oil spills in Shetland. Of course, other organisations also monitor seabirds in Shetland and SOTEAG works closely with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), the RSPB, Fair Isle Bird Observatory, Glasgow University, the Shetland Ringing Group and others to ensure optimum coverage of different species and different areas. Too much data have been collected and too many changes observed to detail here; rather I'll describe the SOTEAG year in the field, and throw in a few personal anecdotes.

Population monitoring

Both breeding and wintering seabirds are counted, the former throughout Shetland and the latter in sheltered sea areas closest to the oil terminal. The summer season actually begins in early April with pre breeding counts of Tysties. In alternate years we count Tysties along the entire coastline of Yell Sound in order to be able to assess the impact of spills at the terminal, and along a number of stretches of coastline strategically sited around Shetland to detect any effects of pollution originating from offshore. The downside of the methodology is that counts must be made between dawn and 9am and, by late April, the alarm clock sometimes has be set for 3am, if only to get up and confirm that it's too windy for a survey! The main conclusion from the Tystie work is that, while they are very vulnerable to inshore oil slicks, they show a remarkable ability to bounce back after a few years, not least in Yell Sound where numbers increased steadily in the 1980s after the devastating losses in the 1979 *Esso Bernicia* oil spill.

Intensive effort

The most intensive field effort comes in June. Fulmars, Guillemots and Razorbills are monitored by repeated counts in study plots at colonies and all have shown changes, Fulmar numbers increasing steadily, and the 2 auks declining in the 1980s but recovering in the 1990s. Kittiwake and Shag nests are counted along long stretches of coastline from one of SNH's Zodiac inflatables. Some of these days are the highlights of the year, exploring the caves and subterranean passages of Papa Stour, or drifting in the sunshine tight under the west cliffs of Hermaness, as thousands of Gannets raucously circle overhead, splattering the boat and its occupants with guano! However, sea conditions are not always so kind and sometimes one has to make difficult decisions on whether to continue a survey - getting into geos and cave entrances in a heavy swell can be tricky and having the Coastguard rescue helicopter scrambled is not one of SOTEAG's aims!

The clifftop work is more routine, although there have been highlights, such as the day I was counting Guillemots at Sumburgh Head and noticed one that seemed blacker than the rest. When it turned its head it became the first Brunnich's Guillemot to be seen in a British colony, causing a considerable hike in British Airways' profits for the Shetland flight in that year.

Red-throated Divers are monitored in a large area of moorland west of Sullom Voe and the Shetland Ringing Group is given an annual grant to study diver numbers and productivity elsewhere. SOTEAG also grant aids seabird studies by Glasgow University on Foula and by De Montfort University around Yell, and encourages the ringing of seabirds through a ring subsidy scheme for selected species.

Low success

Back in 1985 it was noticed that several species, most notably Kittiwakes and terns, were suffering abnormally low breeding success, the start of the controversial "Sandeel crisis". In 1986, we began monitoring breeding success of Fulmars, Shags, Kittiwakes and Guillemots at different colonies around Shetland and this has continued to date. As well as providing a handle on links between chick production and population change, especially for Kittiwakes, these studies give useful information on how the June counts of Guillemots are influenced by colony attendance, and how bad weather affects the counts of Shag nests.

By mid August almost all Shetland's Eiders are concentrated in flocks in traditional

moulting areas, around headlands such as Sumburgh Head, or at offshore skerries such as the rarely visited Ve Skerries northwest of Papa Stour. Surveying these moulting areas (from land, boat or helicopter) is the best way to estimate the size of the Shetland population, which has fallen from at least 16,500 in the mid 1970s to just 6,000 last year. This is a also a good time of year for seeing cetaceans. The first time the late Bobby Tulloch and I headed out from Vidlin in his boat towards Out Skerries, in August 1980, we sighted some dolphins ahead. Bobby cut the engine and we were rewarded by the sight of 30-40 Risso's Dolphins swimming fast and close past us, some leaping almost clear of the water and showing every detail of their scarred sides. Needless to say, there was no camera on board!

Late October sees the arrival of Great Northern Divers and Long-tailed Ducks, and the start of keeping a close check on weather forecasts for that weak ridge or a low centred over the islands that might produce a flat calm day for a boat survey of Yell Sound or the "Bluemull Triangle", the nickname for the Sounds between Yell, Fetlar and Unst. For many years we used Bobby's boat for this and clocked up sightings of White-billed Diver, King Eider, Harlequin Duck and Ivory Gull, as well as following changes in numbers of commoner species in the aftermath of the *Esso Bernicia* spill. As Bobby's health began to fail, more of these counts had to be made from from land, and now it is realised that a combination of surveys from land and sea provides the most comprehensive coverage, at least of Yell Sound.

Beached bird surveys

The initial beached bird surveys in the autumn of 1978 were interrupted by the *Esso Bernicia* and other oil spills in early 1979, but monthly surveys resumed at the end of March 1979 and have continued uninterrupted since. The beaches selected were those onto which dead birds were likely to wash ashore in numbers, although some long, unproductive shores close to the Sullom Voe Terminal are included. They were also chosen to face different directions to allow for changing winds and provide good geographic coverage of the islands. Coverage has changed slightly over the years but SOTEAG staff and 13 volunteers presently survey 74 beaches totalling 49km. Each dead bird is identified and, if possible, aged and sexed, examined for rings and oiling, and then removed from the beach.

To date some some 45,000 dead seabirds have provided information on the levels of chronic oiling around Shetland which, for the past decade or so, has been sporadic rather than persistent, with long 'clean' periods eg the past 9 months being followed by relatively 'dirty' periods eg early 1996. The species most frequently found oiled are Fulmars, Gannets, Kittiwakes and the pelagic auks, while analyses of oil samples suggest that shipping, both tankers and other vessels, is mainly responsible. The results also show patterns of occurrence of the non oil mortality of different species, and, with such a long data set, abnormal 'blips' can be detected quickly. An example was in Sullom Voe recently, where unusually high numbers of first Tysties, then Red-breasted Mergansers and then Eiders, were found dead, mostly as pairs of wings joined by the sternum. It was not until scratch marks and puncture holes were noticed on some of the breastbones that the most likely explanation emerged. These were tooth marks and it seemed that one or more of the many Otters in the voe had taken a liking to bird meat!

Responding to oil spills

An important area of SOTEAG's activity is oil spill contingency planning. In 1990, a Wildlife Response Coordinating Committee (WRCC) was established under the auspices of SOTEAG to "determine policy and practice in relation to oiled wildlife oiled in a major oil spill. To establish a small operational team of wildlife experts who will, in an oil spill incident: direct teams of volunteers on beach surveys; provide appropriate care through the SSPCA for live birds/animals; collect and store corpses; maintain accurate records; liaise with Sullom Voe Terminal Operations Control for day to day briefing; provide assistance to the bird/animal treatment facility."

Represented on the WRCC were the oil industry, local (Shetland Islands Council) and central (Scottish Natural Heritage) government bodies, and voluntary conservation (RSPB and Shetland Bird Club) and animal welfare organisations (SSPCA and Hillswick Wildlife Sanctuary). The co-operative interagency approach is essential and recent additions to membership have been the Northern Constabulary and a local veterinary practice. So, when on 5 January 1993 we heard that a fully laden oil tanker was drifting towards the southern tip of the Shetland Mainland, we were not entirely unprepared Everyone knew basically what to do and who was going to do it, all we had underestimated was the scale and complexity of the task! The many lessons learned during the *Braer* spill were incorporated into the WRCC Oil Spill Plan for Shetland, which is updated annually, as we learn of new techniques or better procedures used elsewhere, or if oil spill exercises highlight deficiencies in the Plan.

Impact

After 20 years what impact has the era of oil had on Shetland's seabird populations? The objective answer is that, apart from the *Esso Bernicia* spill in the first weeks of the Terminal's operation, some lingering effects of which are still evident today, remarkably little so far. In fact, Mike Richardson, NCC Area Officer for Shetland in the 1970s and 1980s, once quipped that the main environmental impact of the Sullom Voe Terminal was on Shetland's moorland, in that oil revenues allowed the Shetland Islands Council to subsidise the extensive agricultural "improvements" of the 1980s! However, there is no room for complacency because, every week, tankers carrying hundreds of thousands of tonnes of oil still negotiate the skerries and tide races of Yell Sound. Soon, they will be berthing at Sullom Voe laden with oil from the Schiehallion Field to the west of the islands. As long as the risk of a devastating oil spill exists, there will be a need to keep an eye on Shetland's Dunters, Tysties and Rain Geese.

Martin Heubeck, AURIS/SOTEAG Ltd,
Sumburgh Head Lighthouse, Virkie, Shetland ZE3 9JN

Razorbills *Bobby Tulloch*

The Isle of May in 1996

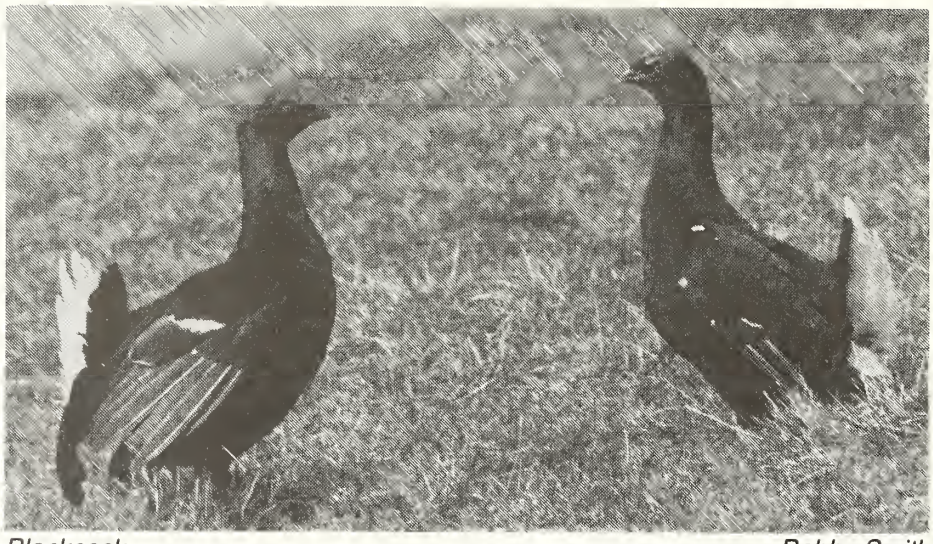
The Observatory opened in early April and the Low Light was occupied more or less continuously until late autumn. In late April the Scottish Wildlife Trust working party again helped with maintenance work to the traps and carried out additional planting. They also spent considerable time in making shelters for the terns to reduce gull predation and provide some shelter in wet weather.

Spring migration was rather quiet but Rosefinch, Bluethroat, Red-backed Shrike, Turtle Dove, Reed Warbler and a Quail were seen. The relative quiet of the spring was enlivened when the bomb disposal squad visited to blow up an old smoke marker! Arguably the best record of the spring was a Tawny Pipit which stayed from 11-14 June. During the summer Mike Martin, with support from friends, reroofed the wash house and, in July, wood panelling replaced the deteriorating plaster work around the fireplace in the Low Light.

The most notable feature of the breeding seabirds was the lateness of the season. Guillemots were about a week to 10 days later than normal and Kittiwakes did not start to nest build until mid June, with the first chick fledging on 25 July. Despite this, productivity was better than in the past few years. Shag numbers continued to increase slowly after the 1994 crash. One interesting feature was the number of second year males breeding, with many doing well for such inexperienced birds. Fulmars and Herring Gulls were also up but Kittiwake and Eider numbers appeared to be slightly down. Terns continue to do well with 530 Arctic and approximately 250 Common and one pair of Roseate Terns nesting. Approximately 25 pairs of Rock Pipits nested; there were 2 pairs of Wheatear and a pair of Wrens nested, the first definite breeding record since 1957.

Three film crews have been to the island: a Channel 4 news item on Greenpeace and the Sand Eel situation, the Big Country programme starring Russell Nisbet and Grampian TV. The archaeological dig continued into its final year. It is believed that the island has the earliest ecclesiastical structure ever found on the east coast of Scotland, dating pre 11th Century.

Anyone wishing to join the Isle of May Trust and receive the Annual Report and other information should contact ***Ian Darling, West Acres, 579 Lanark Road West, Balerno, Edinburgh EH14 7BL.***



Blackcock *Bobby Smith*

Blackgame, Pheasant and Partridge feeding and roosting in a cornstack with passerines

Throughout January and February of 1963, during the coldest period in Scotland since 1795 and, later, with deep snow which fell continuously for 16 hours on 6-7 February, the late Tom Holden and I maintained a watch on a group of traditional corn stacks in a farm yard near New Cumnock, Ayrshire. During that era, ripened Oats were cut, bound into sheaves, grouped together in the field in temporary piles of 8 sheaves known as stooks, left to dry, then carted into the farmyard, where they were built into a large stack to await threshing, usually by a travelling mill.

Corn stacks in the area varied in size and shape. These were oblong, some 24 feet (7.3m) long, by 20 feet (6.0m) wide and a total of 18 feet (5.5m) high. To protect them from the elements, they were, completed with a triangular top apex of 45 degrees which, in turn, was thatched with straw to further deflect snow and rain.

Initially, our main interest was in the very large finch and bunting flocks, including 200+ Twite and 120 Snow Buntings. The farmer first drew our attention to the large number of holes on the south elevation of the stacks, which were marginally softer due to exposure to the brief, weak sunlight and the fact that many small birds were living in them. These turned out to be mainly Chaffinches, Greenfinches and House Sparrows but, clearly, holes approximately 16 inches (40.6cm) in diameter had not been formed by such small birds.

Subsequent observations showed that no fewer than 27 Blackcocks with 5 Greyhens, 9 Grey Partridges and 3 Pheasants were attacking the thatch to gain access to the grain bearing sheaves. Initially the visits were feeding forays but, as the low temperatures and 100% deep snow cover persisted, they remained to roost, emerging at first light to disperse and returning in mid afternoon to both feed and roost in the holes they had formed. The species composition reflected that living locally at that time.

This roosting behaviour of the game birds continued with fluctuating, but generally diminishing numbers, to mid March, 1963 and was not repeated during the subsequent 2 winters.

In 1963, 3 long established Blackcock leks that we were monitoring nearby in south Ayrshire all declined significantly. One, some miles south near Kirkconnel in Dumfriesshire, was completely vacant and has never been reformed, while 5 others in Upper Nithsdale and in Crawick Glen suffered massive reductions, from which they did not recover.

These observations demonstrate the value of the old, outside corn stack system as a shelter and food source. There were at least 860 birds of 19 species exploiting the grain, with another 5 small species roosting in the thatch. I hold further details on record should anyone be interested.

In conclusion, and to his eternal credit, there was no attempt to deter or exploit any of the birds by the farmer involved at the New Cumnock roost, who, in spite of significant damage, recognised and sympathised with their poor condition.

Tom Holden and John Young

A message from your President

Since becoming President, I, together with Council, have had discussions with a view to looking at the future direction of the Club over the next few years and to ensure that there is a strong, vibrant Club, capable of moving forward into the next century.

The Club has a heritage of which it can be justly proud, but the continued success of the Club must have regard to changing circumstances in the world about us.

Many changes have taken place since the Club was founded and the rate of change has accelerated over the last 10 years.

There is a far larger bird watching community and there is now far greater knowledge amongst many birders. This knowledge can be enhanced through television, books, computer technology and a seemingly infinite number of journals.

There is far easier access to overseas travel to see interesting birds that might otherwise be rare visitors to Scotland and, particularly over the last 20 years, there has been significant growth in professional ornithology through our universities and other institutions, such as Scottish Natural Heritage, the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology and the British Trust for Ornithology. There has also been a very significant growth in the number of members groups of bodies such as RSPB and SWT.

These changes put pressure on the SOC and emphasise the need to ensure that our objectives are focused and relevant to the needs of existing members and particularly potential new members.

The real strength of the Club is its membership, especially those who are active and able and willing to participate in meetings, field trips, surveys etc. Members are only likely to participate if they find the activities of the Club are enjoyable, relevant and effectively organised. These aspects of the Club can best be developed at branch level, with support for the branches coming from the centre. There needs to be a strong link between individual branches and from the centre to the branches so that there is a cohesive organisation. As a result of discussions, it is clear that many take the view that the Club should, where possible, be more active in campaigning on conservation issues and we should, whenever possible, cooperate closely with other conservation bodies. There is a widely held view that the SOC should try and involve itself with more tangible features or activities, for example hides at suitable locations, surveys and continental field trips. Many members feel that we undersell ourselves and that there could be much more publicity about the Club and its activities.

The Management Committee and Council will, therefore, over the next year try to ensure that branches have plans for dealing with local conservation issues and, where appropriate, Regent Terrace will deal with national issues. Through the branches we would like to try and involve more individual members to take part in Club activities and branches will be asked to investigate the provision of hides in their area in the hope that these, or comparable facilities, can provide a focus for members.

At Regent Terrace we will try and improve the quality of our promotional material to ensure that our presentations are appealing. Inevitably, many of the issues mentioned above are not new, but, if the Club is to prosper, we must try to ensure that our activities meet the needs of today's birders.

Ian Darling
President

Young Crested Tits *Ernest Ruxton*

Red Deer research

Red Deer have an enormous impact on the Highlands. Researchers at the Macaulay Institute are now using global positioning satellite technology to track the movements of stags. Combined with information from ground surveys, it builds up a picture of deer habitat preferences and may provide answers to questions such as whether deer are affected by walkers.

The Arisaig Hotel

Family run hotel on Arisaig Bay looking over to the island of Eigg. Arisaig provides access to both moorland and coastline offering a great variety of habitats to naturalists. There are boat trips from the harbour opposite the hotel out to the Small Isles - Eigg, Muck and Rum with frequent sightings of whales and dolphins. Accessible by train Arisaig is an ideal location for a holiday that combines seashore, mountains and boat trips.

For more information contact Mr & Mrs Ross, Arisaig Hotel, Arisaig, Inverness-shire PH39 4NH. Tel 01687 450210 Fax 01687 450310

RSPB plan to increase pine forest reserves

The RSPB is hoping to buy Corrimony in the River Beauly catchment area. The area covers 3,780 acres of forestry plantations, open moorland and some remnants of native Scots Pine woodland. RSPB plans to reestablish the native Pinewood in the area, and is appealing to its members for funds to help buy and manage the land. It has also applied for financial support from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

As deer fencing can kill Capercaillies, the RSPB plans to reduce the fencing at Corrimony. It will also reduce grazing by deer and livestock and promote the regeneration of the Pinewood by removing non native trees, planting a small amount of local Scots Pine and thinning commercial Scots Pine plantations using local contractors.

The aim is a mixed age forest of native tree species, with open glades and flourishing ground vegetation such as Blaeberry which is essential food for Capercaillie. Experience gained at Abernethy, in Strathspey, will be used at Corrimony.

RSPB hope to work with local people to develop the site, drawing up detailed plans for the reserve in discussion with the local community. A local woodland grouse officer will be appointed to work to conserve Capercaillie and Black Grouse in and around the reserve.

Unusual head pattern of drake Wigeon

Although most identification texts mention a green patch behind the eye of adult drake Wigeon, illustrations rarely show this feature. It is normally not very obvious in the field. On 18 February 1997, I found a Wigeon on the Eden estuary, Fife, showing a very extensive and prominent green patch. The bird was identical to other drakes in the 1,000 strong flock, except for the head pattern. At a distance of 200m with a x40 telescope, I could see a broad glossy bright green band extending from the eye, curving across the upper ear coverts and ending near the base of the neck. The patch appeared iridescent in the sun, but was also clearly visible when the sun was obscured. The head pattern was remarkably similar to that of nearby drake Teal, except that the green of the Teal was more bluish, and was edged buff.

Scanning the remainder of the flock, I found several drakes with a small green eye patch, and 2 with darker heads than normal, in which the green of the original bird was very dark with a hint of greenish gloss. All other drakes showed no green at all, even at close range in bright sunshine.

The fact that the rest of the plumage was identical to other Wigeon eliminated the possibility of other species or hybrids.

Norman Elkins

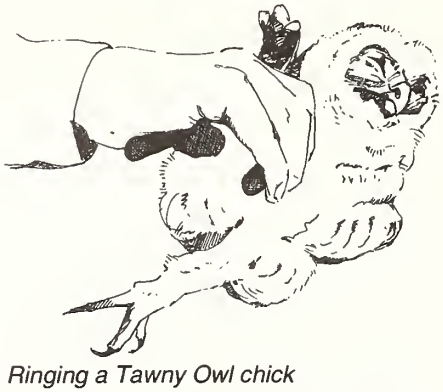
Crossbills breeding early and in extreme conditions

On 25 December 1962, with temperatures the coldest in the UK since 1795, I was escorted by the late Tom Holden to examine a 2 day old brood of 4 Crossbills, hatched from a clutch of 5, some 27 feet (8.2m) up in a Scots Pine, near New Cumnock, Ayrshire. We assumed that they were the nominate *Loxia curvirostra*, which had colonised the Forest of Ae, in Dumfriesshire, at that time. (H Ostroznic, *pers comm*). The 4 nestlings all had what seemed to be a very hard dry membrane formed round both mandibles, suggestive of frozen mucus, which obviously was preventing them from being fed.

We removed the brood to the aviary of a local bird keeper and, with great difficulty, removed the offending material. One bird died while being handled, the remaining 3 were weighed, ringed and returned to the nest at first light the following morning. They were immediately attended by both adults, who remained till 31 December, when the nest was deserted and the nestlings found dead therein on 1 January, 1963. Weighing showed that they had gained weight.

It was difficult to imagine that the adults had deserted what were then healthy young (the membrane did not reform) in spite of the extreme low temperatures as there were no indications that the adults were finding difficulty in obtaining sufficient food. The view held by skilled local bird keepers was that the nestlings showed typical signs of death due to dehydration, although the adults were seen to eat snow and to sit patiently under slowly melting icicles to suck at water droplets, a habit also later observed and photographed in Dumfriesshire by R T Smith and the late J F Young.

Tom Holden and John Young



Ringing a Tawny Owl chick

Derek Robertson

Prolonged incubation by Oystercatcher

In *SBN*35 we noted some unusual nesting activities by Oystercatchers, one of which was on a roadside tree stump nest site in Scottish Borders. In 1996 a pair was in the vicinity of this stump for the first time on 26 March, but activity was not resumed until early May. There was excited activity on the evening of 7 May, and, from the morning of 8 May, an adult was noted incubating as one of us passed twice daily throughout the month.

We checked the nest on 10 June to find 3 eggs, the first occasion on which the adult had been off the eggs and feeding close by. On 20 June one adult was incubating while its mate was repelling a Crow and, on 1 July, the pair was still together, one incubating, one on guard. This was the occasion on which both birds were observed. On 3 July, with the single adult off the nest, we checked to find 3 eggs still remained. The single bird was noted on the nest each day until 16 July, when it rose from the nest to feed close by, and a check revealed one egg. We did not see the nest on 17 July but, on 18 July, the nest was empty and the bird had left the immediate area.

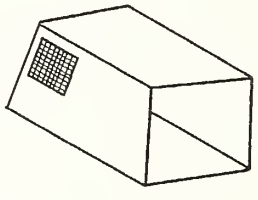
From the first sight of incubation to the final one of 16 July gives a total of 70 days; that its mate remained for 55 days indicates a very strong pair bond. The reason for the failure to hatch is not known but there is increasing local interest in the birds, and many people stop to look and to take photographs so it is possible that this disturbance could have led to chilling in the cold winds of mid May.

David and Margaret Thorne

Nesting Tawny Owls - a successful rescue operation

At the beginning of May 1996 I was working with my father felling trees in the grounds of our hotel. When we felled a Beech tree we noted that 4 young Tawny Owls had fallen from a hole in the trunk where there had been a nest of which we were not previously aware. In order to keep them alive, I put them in a cardboard box and, on the advice of a neighbour, put this in a tree adjacent to the one we had cut down. By the end of that day the adult owls were close by the box.

After 2 or 3 days it was obvious that the cardboard box was going to disintegrate so I got a plastic lawnmower grass collecting box and secured it into the same position that the cardboard one had been in, watched by the adults. One of the chicks had died by this time but one of the adults was observed bringing in part of a Rabbit to the 3 remaining chicks. A second chick died subsequently but the two surviving chicks grew well.



No alterations were made to the grass box, but, being waterproof from above and with side ventilation, it provided an ideal nest box.

The 2 survivors were ringed by a local ringer on 18 May and went on to fledge, fed by both adults.

Jonathan Charlton

Pretentious - moi?

The headline for this little piece comes from an episode of that comedy classic *Fawlty Towers* and is prompted by recent correspondence from a certain extremely well known conservation body in response to development proposals. Although the land in question is not of high ornithological interest, being under intensive arable cultivation, it is said to hold 'a suite of declining species'.

Until I read this I had always thought that a suite was a set of furniture, the term usually being applied to the settee and armchairs kept in the best room in the house and, at least in industrial Scotland, purchased from the local Co-op. Although the uninitiated might think the purpose of this furniture was for the family to sit on, this was rarely the case, except on special occasions and only once bottoms were appropriately covered in one's best troosers, never overalls.

However, if conservationists now consider the Grey Partridge, Corn Bunting and Skylark to form a 3 piece suite, it may offer an explanation as to their declining numbers. It can't be helpful for small birds to be sat upon, even by well meaning persons, especially when they are weighed down by all the paper that modern conservationists carry about.

Stan da Prato

New president of SWT

Sir John Lister-Kaye, landowner, naturalist and author has been appointed president of the Scottish Wildlife Trust, a post left vacant since the death of the Duke of Atholl in 1996. Sir John's departure from the northwest board of Scottish Natural Heritage was widely seen as part of a purge of outspoken conservationists. Sir John, who runs an environmental centre near Beauly, is likely to adopt a higher profile than his predecessor. His views on the need for Highland sporting estates to "leave the 19th century behind" and reform of agricultural and forestry policy in favour of nature conservation are well known. He has also said that an increase in SWT membership has to be a priority and reckons that its 15,000 members need to be increased to nearer 50,000.

Also announced was the appointment of a new chairman for SWT with Dr Hugh Ingram taking over from Professor Aubrey Manning. Dr Ingram is currently senior lecturer in Botany at Dundee.

Branch news

Fife branch cross the Tay!

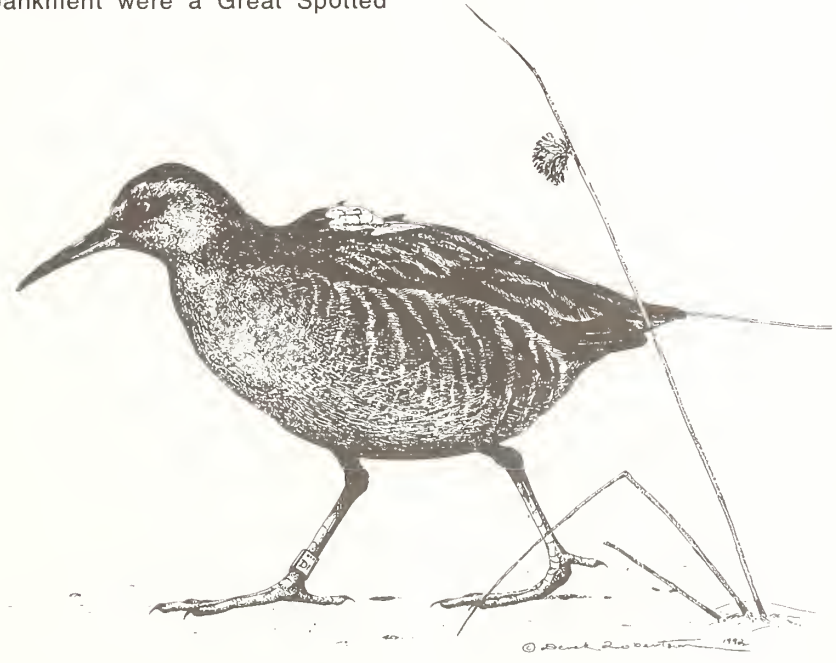
On a Saturday in January, Sam Taylor led a group of 9 to the north side of the Tay estuary which many of us do not know as well as we should. After some navigational toing and froing (and even some upping and Downing - for some strange reason Brian was very keen to show us all a nice cul de sac in a housing estate in St Madoes) we explored the reedbeds and immediate hinterland at Port Allen and Errol.

Not all of us had realised that the Tay reedbeds are the largest natural reedbed in Britain. Actual bird sightings in the reeds at this time of year were fairly limited. Out on the river a few Whooper Swans trumpeted musically, Greylag Geese flew past, while parties of Shelduck, Mallard, Goldeneye and Goosander and the odd Cormorant fed or loafed around. In the reeds themselves only Blue Tits and the ubiquitous Reed Buntings, plus one very startled Pheasant, were conspicuous; other secretive inhabitants, like Water Rail, revealed themselves by sound or brief glimpses to some of the younger eyes and ears among us. In the trees along the embankment were a Great Spotted Woodpecker and Treecreepers. One of the more unexpected sightings here was a close encounter with a winter plumaged David Bell engaged in a wildfowl count of the upper Tay estuary.

With impeccable timing we got back to the cars just as the threatened rain began. Could this, perhaps, explain why Norman Elkins, who had indicated he might well come on this outing, did not in fact appear; there must be some benefits from knowing what the weatherman has in store for us. We drove downstream to Kingoodie where we sat in the cars and ate our sandwiches, or three course meals in some cases, and watched the waders having their lunch as the tide receded. Enthusiasm for traipsing across the mud of Invergowrie Bay seemed to have faded by this stage and it was agreed to head home in time to watch Scotland thrash Wales at Murrayfield. Unfortunately this turned out to be a forlorn hope but that is another story....

Donald Stewart

In fact, Fife branch outings regularly produce many good birds, as their excellent Newsletter testifies, including Smew, Glaucous, Iceland and Little Gulls, various raptors and Waxwings.



Water Rail *Derek Robertson*

Eigg sold at last

The long running attempt by local people, to buy their island with backing from SWT and Highland Council, has at last succeeded. The Isle of Eigg is now owned by a trust. The trust intend to develop the island in environmentally friendly ways including wildlife tourism.

Knoydart next?

Knoydart is known for its rugged scenery, absence of roads and people, most of whom were cleared off years ago. Its last owner went bankrupt. Attempts to buy the land foundered over legal technicalities but these may soon be overcome.

REVIEWS

The Raven *by Derek Ratcliffe. 1997. T & A D Poyser. 316 pp. £25 hardback. ISBN 0-85661-090-9.*

Any ornithologist, field worker or interested naturalist who has studied Peregrines in the UK will undoubtedly know of Derek Ratcliffe as the guru of that species. His 2 editions of *The Peregrine Falcon* are rightly regarded as classics. This book is a similar tour de force which succeeds, again, in portraying the character of a bird species while remaining an important scientific overview. The author's high regard for his subject and involvement with its mixed fortunes over 50 years of direct observation help to enhance the reader's enjoyment. Ratcliffe shows that any amount of factual knowledge can be successfully communicated when informed personal opinion is added.

The Raven is, of course, a bird of myth and legend, and this book contains a separate, fascinating section on the Raven in human history. Unfortunately, its modern day persecutors are no respecters of such matters. Ratcliffe does not shy away from this important subject, stating "the sitting bird was shot by a keeper" in the caption of a nest photograph. With growing demands for weakening of bird protection laws, this lengthy record of large scale destruction, both legal and illegal, of Ravens should add more ammunition to those who oppose the idea of "selective killing" of such birds. There is also a discussion of the reasons for the place of the Raven in the UK environment. The author does not evade potentially difficult questions such as the probable decline of Ravens if conservationists are successful in curtailing the present high levels of grazing on our uplands. His answer is that "This could easily be compensated by allowing the bird to reach its potential in those many areas where it is at present deliberately held down".

We are in danger of becoming spoilt in ornithology by the quality of the artwork in our bird books. Illustrations such as those produced by Chris Rose for this book go well beyond mere graphic interpretation and anyone lucky enough to own one of the originals will no doubt give it pride of place on their wall.

To sum up, in your row of Poysers in the bookcase, this is one which will not long remain in its pristine condition - expect to keep going back for another look.

Dave Dick

Bird Song: Biological themes and variations *by CK Catchpole and PJB Slater. 1997. C.U.P. 248 pp. £19.95. ISBN 0-521-417996.*

The authors are both well known to ornithologists for their studies of bird song and its biological functions. They have written an authoritative book which they correctly suggest will be of use to birdwatchers interested in why birds behave as they do, as well as students and researchers. The literature cited runs to 20 pages. Each of the 9 main chapters has been critically commented on by a specialist.

The book moves from basic methodology through the mechanisms by which song is produced, the ways in which it develops to its relationship to the bird's environment and the functions song serves.

The book is nicely produced. I like the use of drawings to enliven graphs and other statistics. It is a little expensive for its size but nevertheless a credit to its authors, one of whom recently served on the editorial panel of *Scottish Birds*.

Stan da Prato

Who's Who in Ornithology *Edited by John E Pemberton. 1997. Buckingham Press. 416 pp. £29.95. Hardback. ISBN 0-951-496581.*

This appears to be a collection of obituaries of people who are not yet dead. Unlike real obituaries, this means the chosen ones have been able to vet - and presumably censor - what has been written about them, thus reducing the entertainment value of the book.

Stan da Prato

Other books received

Where to watch birds in Kent, Surrey & Sussex 3rd ed. *D Taylor, J Wheatley & D Burges, Helm. £12.99 ISBN 0-7136-4544-X*

Where to watch birds in Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire & other former West Midlands Counties 2nd ed. *G Harrison & J Sankey, Helm. £12.99 ISBN 0-7136-4478-8*

Where to watch birds in Dorset, Hampshire & the Isle of Wight. *G Green & M Cade, Helm £12.99 ISBN 0-7136-4313-7*

Library news

Right up to the time of his death in 1974 Prof Maury Meiklejohn wrote a weekly articles in *The Glasgow Herald*. Over a period of 20 years more than 1,000 were published. Through various donations the Library has what we think is a full collection, however quite a few are not originals but poor copies which are difficult to read. If any member has any of these articles which they do not want or which we could copy we would be pleased to see them. Special thanks are due to Bob Caldow who has spent hours sorting our collection of these delightful articles into chronological order.

David Clugston

Recent donations

Andrew McMillan has kindly donated a substantial quantity of files containing correspondence and original records. These were collected during the past 40 years as an Editor of *Scottish Birds* and the *Edinburgh Bird Bulletin*.

Pat Palmar has also recently made a donation of her late husband Charlie's papers. These include articles, diaries and correspondence. The Library is very willing to accept original field notebooks, diaries and papers for its archives. Members should, however, discuss the proposed donations with the Librarian as we do not have unlimited space!

Journals etc for sale

We have a large selection of back numbers of British and overseas journals, reports, magazines, for sale. Please send details of your requirements, or an sae for a summary list to **The Librarian, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT or Fax 0131 558 9947.**

History Working Group

An important element of the Club's library is the archives. This was evident at the last Library Open Day, when several readers perused diaries and minute books from the early days of the SOC and its predecessors. The archives have also been the subject of discussion among some members since the conference last November.

Why collect archives? The need to do so made itself felt at the conference. In celebration of the Club's 60th anniversary we heard, and saw, as film, some

fascinating contributions related to the Club as it was some decades ago, but it was also clear how much more could have been told if only the information were available. Quite apart from the Club's own history - and after 60 years we must recognise that it does have a history, and an interesting one at that - we might also begin thinking about the history of Scottish ornithology and the SOC's involvement in it.

No decision on such an ambitious project need be made just yet. The possibility of undertaking it will, however, disappear unless adequate records are collected. So the Library is keen to acquire any archives relating to Scottish ornithology in general. It already has some, but a great deal more material is being lost every year as older members die without recording their memories, including members who founded the Club or were otherwise involved in the early years. The failure to record their memories and the dispersal of their records are no small part of the 'loss to Scottish ornithology' which their death often represents.

So we feel that the Club needs a History Working Group - an idea which has been approved by the Management Committee. The Group's initial task will be to collect archival material, and to find out what other ornithological archives relating to the SOC and Scotland exist elsewhere. If any of you have material you think would be of interest - diaries, notebooks, memories (written or taped), photographs, newspaper cuttings, and the like - now or in the future, please contact any member of the Group. As a second and rather more active approach, we are considering contacting a selected list of members, with a view to recording interviews on audio tape.

Any comments on these ideas would be welcome - please let any one of us know what you think. The members of the Group are **Geoffrey Harper (0131 558-3139), John Arnott (0131 441-3567), John Ballantyne (0131 556-5453) and Rob Lambert (01334 477869).**

Field Guides for Russia

It is over 3 years since Vadim Ryabitsev, chairman of the Urals Branch of the Menzbier Ornithological Society, showed slides of tundra birds at a Lothians Branch meeting, and also mentioned some of the problems facing Russian birders. At that meeting Roger Brewer suggested that we should send our second hand field guides to help meet the shortage in Russia.

Thus was borne the Field Guides for Russia scheme and it has been a great success. All members of the Urals Branch who need them now have field guides. Some surplus ones for new members, together with other bird books donated are retained in the Menzbier Society's branch library in Ekaterinburg. We have managed not only to send English language field guides, to be used in conjunction with a Russian/ Latin/English birdnames list prepared by Vadim, but, through the generosity of Friedrich Cornelius, a number of excellent German field guides have also reached Ekaterinburg. These are of particular value, not only for Russians whose second language is German rather than English, but because the guides also include the Russian bird names. We have sent getting on for 100 books, and, so far as we know, none has gone astray in the post. Congratulations, Roger, on conceiving such a practical and productive project.

The attempt has also been made to set up a more general partnership between our clubs on the basis of the field guides scheme but this has run into problems, the main one being distance. There are rather few other ways in which we can usefully cooperate, given the difficulties in members of the 2 clubs meeting each other. The field guides scheme has involved a lot of correspondence, which is time consuming, and any further activities would require other people to lend a hand.

However, the partnership idea is far from moribund. The success of our scheme has provided a model for others, and, to date, 2 more have been set up - between North Northumberland Bird Club and the Perm Branch of the Menzbier Society, also in the Urals, and between Gwent Ornithological Society and the St Petersburg Ornithological Society. It is hoped that other field guide schemes and partnerships will start up soon - and I'm still seeking a UK partner for Moscow Ornithological Society.

Geoffrey Harper

MEMBERS' REQUESTS

Wing tagged Red Kites and Sea Eagles

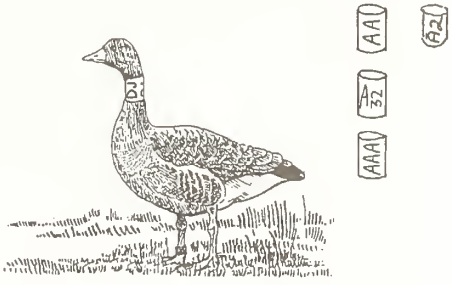
see *SBN* 40: pages 3 & 14

Wing tagged Hen Harriers, Colour ringed Ring Ouzels, Colour ringed Stonechats, Colour ringed Mute Swans and Colour ringed Reed Buntings

see *SBN* 43: page 15

Colour marked Greylag Geese

Sightings of Greylags bearing dye marks, darvic rings or neck collars, together with details of colours and letters seen, no matter how incomplete, should be sent to: **Bob Swann, 14 St Vincent Road, Tain, Ross-shire IV19 1JR (01862 894329)**



This is DJ - collars should be read from the bottom up.

Colour marked Oystercatchers

Sightings of yellow dye marked Oystercatchers, especially their breeding locations, will be greatly appreciated by: **Pat French, Grianan, Strone Road, Newtonmore, Inverness-shire PH20 1BA. Telephone 01540 673719**

SOC NOTICES

SOC at Scotland's biggest conservation event

Five leading wildlife conservation charities - RSPB, NTS, WWF Scotland, SCPT and the SWT, are combining to organise Scotland's largest conservation event, **The Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Fair.** The Fair, to be held at the RSPB Vane Farm Nature Reserve on the banks of Loch Leven, will welcome visitors on 30/31 August 1997.

Combining the conservation message of the event '*Managing Water for Wildlife*' with family fun and games, the Fair offers something for everyone, with wildlife workshops, talks, competitions and demonstrations. An exciting programme of events, with celebrity guests and a host of activities, will make an exciting weekend.

Lizars will host a marquee featuring top optical suppliers offering visitors the chance to try and buy from a wide selection of binoculars, telescopes and cameras.

If you would like to come along and help out at the SOC stand please contact: **Sylvia or Pamela at 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh. 0131 556 6042.** We will be delighted to hear from you.

200 Club

Winners in the first quarter of 1997 were:

January - 1st £30 H Robb, Stirling; 2nd £20 R Craig, Peebles; 3rd £10 R Smith, Dorchester.
February - 1st £30 J Jackson, Chester; 2nd £20 S Taylor, St Andrews; 3rd £10 H Harper, Edinburgh.
March - 1st £50 R Sellars, Naislworth; 2nd £30 M Compston, Melrose; 3rd £20 D Donnelly, Hamilton; 4th £10 M Gibson, Galashiels.

All members who re-joined at the start of the 200 Club's ninth year on 1 June, are very warmly thanked. By the end of May we had 188 members. Can we reach 200 this year? If you would like to join, or take out more than one membership and are over 18, please send me a cheque for £12 payable to 'SOC 200 Club'. You will be very welcome, entered for the next draw and your cheque will be acknowledged by **Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL. (Tel. 01896 822176).**

Scottish Birds

The Club's journal is increasingly popular with authors, no doubt encouraged by our policy of rarely rejecting papers or notes. However, we do edit them and sometimes have to reduce papers to shorter notes or even transfer the item to *SBN*, with the author's permission. The bad news is that a backlog is starting to build up. December 1997's Scottish Birds is already full so editing is going to have to be tougher in future!

First Scottish records

In future these will be published in the *Scottish Bird Report* rather than *Scottish Birds*.

Annual Conference

The 1997 Annual Conference will be at the Balavil Sport Hotel, Newtonmore from 31 October to 2 November 1997. Further details will be sent with the September mailing.

Birds - original colour slides
SAE for current list and prices to:-
Vanellus Presentations,
44 Southgrove Road, Sheffield S10 2NQ Tel (0114) 2664362

New members on committees

Bob Swann and Mick Marquiss have joined the Editorial Panel of *Scottish Birds* and Norman Elkins has joined the Surveys & Research Committee.

Council resignation

Bill Bourne has resigned from the Council of the Club. As his term expires this autumn, there is no need to co-opt a replacement.

Nominations for Council

Nominations for 2 new Council members are required to replace Bill Bourne and Angus Hogg. Nominations should be made in writing with a proposer and seconder and should be sent to **The Secretary, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT no later than 31 July 1997.**

Branch meetings

Dates for the branch meetings in September are as follows:-
Sept 8 - Clyde; Sept 15 - Borders; Sept 16 - Highland, Lothian & West Galloway; Sept 17 - Ayrshire, Caithness, Dumfries & Fife; Sept 18 - Orkney, Stewartry, Stirling & Tayside.

Discussion Group 1997

The South East Scotland Discussion Group meets monthly in the Library at 21 Regent Terrace to talk about fieldwork, surveys and local conservation issues. All members are welcome to attend. Meetings start at 7.30 pm and are normally on the first Wednesday of the month apart from the summer. The dates for the rest of 1997 are: 3 September, 1 October, 5 November and 3 December.

Congratulations!

We received 6 correct answers to the bird names competition in the last issue of *Scottish Bird News*. The Club President, wearing white gloves and tuxedo, didn't pick out Lancelot or Mystic Meg, but Donald Stewart of St Andrews. The correct answers were Blackbird, Corn Bunting, Woodpigeon, Kittiwake, Guilliemot, Razorbill, Puffin, Cormorant, Peregrine, Dunlin, Ringed Plover, Oystercatcher and Swallow. Well done Donald, who is now the proud owner of an SOC mug!

Conservation comment

The SOC has commented on a number of issues including a proposed Mussel Farm at Minard Bay, Loch Fyne; this proposal has since been rejected by Argyll Council.

Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club. It is published 4 times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices need to be sent to the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace no later than 5 weeks before publication. The magazine acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and to disseminate information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. The views expressed in articles in *Scottish Bird News* are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication. The SOC also publishes the journal *Scottish Birds* which publishes original papers and notes on Scottish Ornithology and the *Scottish Bird Report*. For details of these publications and membership contact the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

Gardening

As many members know 21 Regent Terrace has a back garden. The reason we have the building is to serve as a centre for ornithology in Scotland so gardening is clearly not a priority. The policy with the garden is to maintain it in a way that provides some benefit to wildlife without it getting totally overgrown and at mininal cost to Club funds, though we have no choice but to pay £270 per annun as part owner of the adjacent communal grounds which are professionally maintained.

In our patch there is a lawn with shrubs on either side. We encourage species of benefit to birds eg *Cotoneaster*. We have a lawn mower and *SBN's* editor periodically gets rid off tree seedlings and chops down bushes. We could do with a strimmer and/ or someone who would volunteer to come in a few times during the growing season to strim the areas the mower cannot cope with. Any offers to **Sylvia at 21 Regent Terrace, 0131 556 6042.**

Thanks to

Thanks are once again due to the many willing volunteers who come in every quarter and stuff envelopes. The stuffers for the March mailing were: Bob & Betty Smith, Sue Goode, Noreen Stabler, Neville Crowther, Rosemary Davidson, Margaret Abel, Ian Florence, Joan Wilcox, Peter Vandome and Keith Macgregor.

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THE SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Scottish Bird News

SEPTEMBER 1997 No. 47
ISSN 0268-3199

Edited by Stan da Prato
Assisted by Pamela Black, Sylvia Laing and Joan Wilcox

The 1997 breeding season in Scotland

Once again we present our round up of the breeding season that has just passed. As usual we stress that it is based on fieldworkers' first opinions and tends to highlight the more obvious events and changes. Readers should remember that the article is put together in early July when not all relevant information is available. The full picture will become available later when the results of the BTO's Common Bird Census, the new Breeding Bird Survey and the many specialist surveys are published.

The weather

In 1996 we commented on remarkable extremes and their effects on breeding birds. This year we make a similar comment although the details are different. Winter mortality seems to have been lower than a year ago despite a short cold snap in mid winter. Early spring was mild and some species made a good start to their breeding seasons. However, early May saw unusually cold weather with some snow. By the end of the month some parts of the country were experiencing wetter than average conditions. June and early July saw above average rainfall in the east of Scotland which led to severe flooding in some parts.

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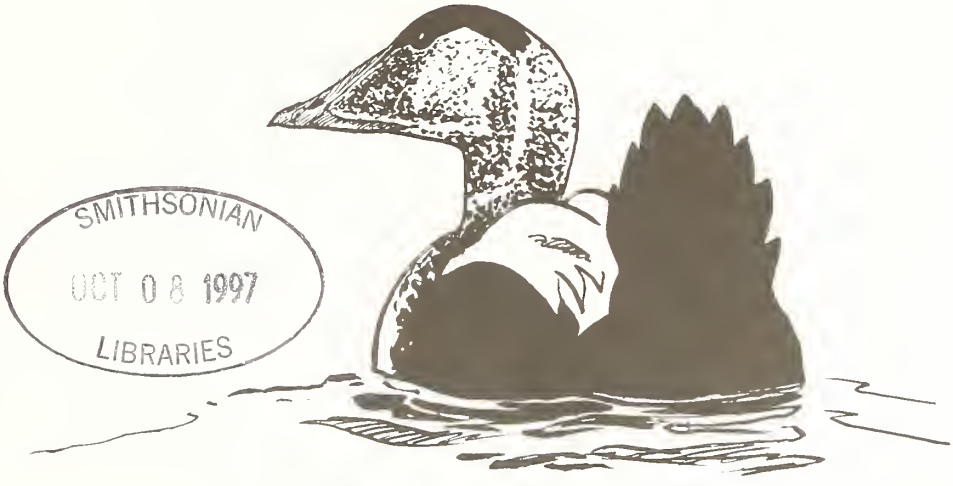


Drake Eider — *John Busby*

Raptors

The Red Kite success story continued with at least 27 pairs attempting to breed compared to 17 in 1996. However, productivity seems to have been poor although it is too early to say what the final outcome will be. More Ospreys tried to breed but productivity also seems to have been affected by the weather and by human interference. Human interference undoubtedly affected Hen Harriers and Peregrines in several parts of Scotland although in east Tayside an average of 3 chicks per successful nest was recorded.

Merlins are less likely to suffer persecution and seem to have done well in several study areas at least in the early part of the season. Wet weather may have resulted in reduced fledging success. Kestrels did well in Ayrshire due to high vole numbers.

Golden Eagle experienced a poor year in east Tayside due to bad weather in early May, but fared slightly better in western areas.

Buzzards continued to increase in those parts of Scotland where persecution has been reduced. The high numbers of Rabbitts in so many parts of the country undoubtedly help breeding Buzzards.

Owls

The link between owls and small mammals, particularly Short-tailed Field Voles, is well known. Short-eared Owls benefited from high vole numbers in many parts of Scotland. Tawny and Barn Owls also had a better season than last year; this was particularly important for the latter species which had suffered during the 1995/96 winter. That elusive bird the Long-eared Owl is reported on less frequently. Long-ears did well in Ayrshire but badly in Easter Ross. Owl numbers are affected by the abundance of their prey but in and around the Trossachs Tawny Owls using nest boxes had their young predated by Grey Squirrels and Pine Martens.

Seabirds

Many reports were not to hand when we compiled this summary, perhaps indicating a late season. Terns increased on the Isle of May to around 900 pairs, mostly Arctic. Breeding success has been poor at several tern colonies such the Ythan where the colony is now almost non existant and on Papa Westray, where over a 1000 pairs of Arctic Terns failed due to a storm on 1 July.

Black-headed Gulls did not breed on the Ythan while colonies in north Fife have been wiped out for unknown reasons. It seems that the breeding success of Kittiwakes has been below average. On the Isle of May Puffins did poorly due to flooded burrows.

Eiders on the Ythan are now at a very low ebb due to predation by Foxes, crows and gulls and possibly also conditions during the winter.

Waders

Observers continued to express concern over declines in species such as Lapwings on farmland. Lapwings and other waders seem to have suffered during the wet weather though Oystercatchers may have fared a little better. Common Sandpipers in the Borders seem to have increased after last year's low.

Corvids

One group that continues to do well is the Crow family. Magpies continue to spead in areas were they used to be kept down by gamekeepers, Carrion Crows and Jackdaws were said to be increasing in many places. Ravens' fortunes varied.

Summer migrants

The Swallow is the bird which most people associate with the coming of summer. Swallows and other hirundines arrived early in many parts of the country. However, numbers in some areas, including parts of Lothian and Border, were down. The weather seem to have delayed breeding. It is too early to comment meaningfully on breeding succes. In the south west Swallows seem to have done well with their first broods. However, later broods seem to have suffered food shortages.

The wet weather led to collapsing river banks which destroyed some Sand Martin colonies.

In the hills there were varying reports about Wheatear, Whinchat and Ring Ouzel numbers and breeding success. Suggestions that Meadow Pipits were down in numbers are hard to substantiate since so few people regularly census what is the commonest breeding bird in upland Scotland. It will be interesting to see what the relatively new BTO Breeding Bird Survey eventually says about these upland species which were poorly represented in the CBC.

In the Trossachs nest box occupation by Redstarts was up 30% on 1996 although there were few repeat broods. Pied Flycatcher numbers were similar to 1996 but breeding success was affected by the weather. Spotted Flycatchers remain well below the numbers recorded even a few years ago.

The numbers of several species of warblers appear to have been high notably Wood and Garden Warblers and Blackcaps. There is still no evidence of a decline in Willow Warblers which has been reported from parts of England. Lesser Whitethroats were harder to find in the Lothians although poor weather may have contributed to this.

Quail and Cuckoo numbers were the highest in parts of Scotland for many years.

Magpie *Andy Dowell*

The recent increase in Corncrakes on Orkney may have been reversed though the weather may have discouraged birds from calling. Despite the wet weather at least 3 singing male Nightjars were recorded in June in the south west.

Resident passerines and near passerines

Both Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers have returned to some Lothian woods. Cold sensitive species such as Wrens, Goldcrests and Long-tailed Tits all increased. Song Thrush numbers continue to cause concern in the Lowlands but seem to be far healthier in the Highlands and Islands. The weather may have actually helped thrushes obtain food such as worms for their young.

Several nest box studies report a good breeding season for tits. Siskins benefited from a good cone crop in Sitka Spruce in south west Scotland and possibly some other areas. Numbers of Crossbills were high though at least some of these birds are immigrants; 1997 is proving to be an irruption year with many Crossbills reported in Orkney and Shetland.

Many seed eating birds have suffered due to modern agriculture but there is local evidence of increases where food has becme avialable for example through setaside schemes. Goldfinches have increased in several areas though Redpolls are less common in Lothian than they used to be. Bullfinches are difficult to census but seem to be less common. Tree Sparrows bred well in nestboxes at Blairgowrie and seem to have increased in some other areas.

Thanks

These are due to Ian Poxton, Bob Smith, Paul Doyle, Andy Dowell, Brian Etheridge, Brian Cosnette, Sandra Hacker, Bruce Anderson, Malcolm Harvey, Gordon Riddle, Dave Arthur, Norman Elkins, Brian Neath, Mark Holling, Henry Robb, Geoff Shaw, Bill Brackenridge, Ian Frances, Stan da Prato, Bob Swann, Donnie Macdonald, Alex Joss, Patrick Stirling-Aird, Eric Meek, Pete Gordon, Mike Harris, Sarah Wanless, Darren Hemsley, Jarred Wilson and Keith Brockie.

Apologies to anyone whose form came in after 15 July when we had to finalise this article. Anybody wishing to contribute to next year's round up should contact 21 Regent Terrace so that we can add your name to the mailing list.

Fish eating birds don't deserve to be shot

This article, originally published in the Scotsman, was written by the paper's angling correspondent, Bruce Sandison. We are grateful to Mr Sandison and the Scotsman for permission to reprint it.

What price a Buzzard? Apparently £150, the amount a grouse moor keeper was fined in May for killing a Buzzard on the Tomvaich Estate near Grantown on Spey. This is less than the charge for a day's salmon fishing on a prime Spey beat, a tiny fraction of the cost of a day's driven grouse shooting and unlikely to pay the bill for dinner for 4 at a top sporting hotel. But as far as Sheriff James Keegan was concerned, dishing out his dictum in Inverness Sheriff Court, it seems that Buzzards come cheap.

Before angling ornithologists steam up over this paltry fine, they should have a look at a recent edition of *The Angling Times* and remember what happens to stone throwing people who live in glass houses. The front page on 4 December 1996 blazoned the cry, supported by a gruesome picture: "These birds must be killed. This is the picture every angler wants to see - the man, the gun and the Cormorants!"

Warming to the theme, readers of the journal that claims to be "the voice of your sport" were invited to turn to pages 8/9 to view "the most vivid pictures ever on the underground anti Cormorant campaign", birds which, according to the paper, are "eating your fish, killing your waters". Had it not been for the date I would have assumed it was an April Fool's joke.

The unnamed hero gunman is described examining his 'bag': "As Mr X's knife rips through the chest of the dead birds the air is filled with the stench of rotting fish. The Cormorants have been enjoying a varied diet ... bream, perch, sticklebacks and a common carp ..." He suggests that anglers "post Cormorant beaks to the RSPB Headquarters - 500 in a week should make them listen"... and so on, much in the same gory prose vein.

I agree that there is a "rotting stench here", but not the stench of rotting fish: in my view it is the stench of rotten, irrational, tabloid journalism. *The Angling Times* is not, in any way, the voice of my sport, nor do I believe it is the voice of the vast majority of the anglers that I come into contact with. I want no part of this rubbish and neither, I believe, does the general congregation of the Scottish angling kirk.

Moulting sawbills and Black-headed Gull *David Mitchell*

There is hardly a single shred of evidence to show that shooting wild birds will stop them doing what God designed them to do: feed themselves and their young; be they Buzzards, Golden Eagles, Hen Harriers, Cormorants, Mergansers or Goosanders. This is an environmental fact of life. Studies in Canada, America and in the UK clearly demonstrate that, even if you do shoot these birds, others will simply arrive to take their place; that outwith ornithological genocide, nothing can be done.

However, it is also a fact that fish eating birds can and do cause havoc in stocked waters. I sympathise with the fishery owner who spends thousands of pounds on hatchery reared fish only to see them disappearing down the throats of our marauding feathered friends. But surely that is part of the cost of running these operations? If the stew pond fish were not there, the birds wouldn't be there.

Cormorant persecution

According to the *Herald* the chief baliff of the mid Clyde Angling Association has been asked to carry out a survey of Cormorants on the Rivers Clyde and Avon in Lanarkshire, after claims that the birds "were building up to numbers that threatened angling". The rivers are stocked with trout and have natural populations of Grayling, Salmon and Sea Trout.

Meanwhile in Fife police wildlife liaison officers have appealed to the public for help to stop the illegal killing of Cormorants around the Tay and Forth estuaries.

Otters increase

The Vincent Wildlife Trust's third survey shows that Otters are now recorded in almost every 10km squarein Scotland except for a few in the south east.

Costing the Earth

The cost of life on Earth has been calculated at £54 trillion each year. That is the price we would theoretically have to pay for fresh air, clean water, food, minerals, scenery, art and wildlife.

The exercise, conducted by the University of Maryland along with researchers from Holland and Argentine, is published in *Nature* magazine. Their total (a trillion is a million millions) is a very conservative one.

Because the planet's ecosystem is left out of commercial calculations it is too often ignored.

The researchers divided the goods and services the Earth provides into 17 categories for example: climate regulation, water supply, soil formation, biological control, food production and cultural benefits.

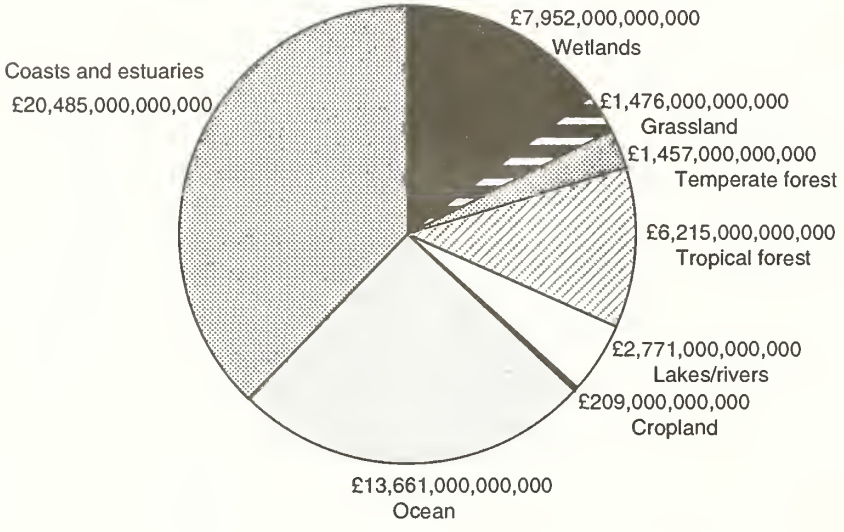
The planet was then divided into different 'biomes' such as grasslands, open ocean or tropical forests. Economic formulae were then used to calculate the value per unit area of each service in each ecosystem type.

Arriving at a figure for a given service was difficult. An area of forest may have a commercial value for its timber of £500 but also provide conservation value of £700 the price those who enjoy it would be prepared to pay to keep it. The total value therefore is £1200.

There are no valuation studies for desert, ice packs or tundra so these were omitted from the calculations.

Even at the conservative total of £54 trillion per year, the net value of the Earth is almost twice the world's combined annual Gross National Product.

Costing the earth - valuation criteria



Figures were calculated by estimating the value per year of these environment functions.
Regulation of gas levels in atmosphere including greenhouse gases; capacity to dampen effects of environmental fluctuations (storms, floods etc); regulation of water flow; storage and retention of water; soil retention (halting erosion etc); soil formation (rock weathering and accumulation of organic matter) nutrient recycling; waste treatment; pollination; biological control through natural predators etc; species' habitats; food production; raw material supply (timber, fuel, fodder); gene pool (for medicines, plant byrids etc); recreation; cultural (aesthetic, artisitc and educational value).

Balmoral eagles

Work by the Tayside Raptor Study Group reveals that a pair of Golden Eagles in the southern part of the Queen's Balmoral estate has failed to rear young in 13 out of the last 15 years.

Since 1982 the eagles have only successfully raised 2 chicks, one in 1984 and the other in 1991. Keith Brockie, the chairman of the Tayside Raptor Study Group, points out that in these 2 years the eyries were on a high, inaccessible crag. In the other 13 years, the eyries were on the eagles' preferred crag lower down the glen and more vulnerable to disturbance.

"I have little doubt that this pair of eagles on the Balmoral estate has been persecuted. The figures speak for themselves." Keith says "The failure usually happens around late incubation or early chick stage. It is my opinion that the eagles have been deliberately kept off the nest."

The factor at the Balmoral estate, Peter Ord, told the press "I am quite certain no one from the Balmoral estate persecutes eagles". He points out that 2 other pairs of Golden Eagles in the north of the estate have been breeding successfully.

Willie Potts, Balmoral's gamekeeper at the southern site between 1972 and 1988, agrees that the birds started failing to raise young in the 1980s but blames this on the growing number of walkers. He and Sandy Masson, Balmoral's head gamekeeper for 17 years who retired in January, have denied interfering with the birds.

Ornithologists, including Dr Adam Watson, believe that disturbance by walkers is unlikely to have caused the eagles' failure to breed. Adam thinks that persecution is the most likely explanation. He points out that the eagles have been nesting at the site since at least 1945 and that they succeeded in raising young in 12 of the 18 years up to 1981.

Previous issues of SBN have drawn attention to concern over management at Balmoral initially over the issue of fencing and its effect on Capercaillie. However, Adam Watson disputes claims by some conservationists that Balmoral is the worst managed estate in Britain. "Balmoral is the second worst," he told the press recently. "The worst is Glenfeshie estate now run by the Wills Woodlands Trust."

Osprey *Steven Brown*

Osprey eggs stolen

Sunday 11 May 1997 saw the first theft this year from an Osprey nest in Scotland. The raiders climbed a 40ft tree to reach the nest near Carrbridge. It was the second time in 5 years that eggs have been taken from the same nest. It may now be abandoned by birds which have used it for 15 years.

The theft happened 2 hours after the nest had been checked by a volunteer. The Ospreys were seen acting unusually, not incubating but perched on trees. A check revealed that the 3 eggs, which were close to hatching, had been taken.

Dave Dick, Investigations Officer with the RSPB, said the nest was targeted by raiders who would have known there were only a few days left before the eggs hatched. "The birds won't lay again this year and it maybe they won't come back to that nest again. If they are left alone they will continue to use the same nest for years, but if they are disturbed they may move out."

Dave said thefts from Osprey nests have become less frequent. Three raids were reported last year, compared with about 12 a year a few years ago.

The latest raid is unusual in that it was discovered so quickly: "We sometimes don't hear about robberies until 3 or 4 days after they happen when someone goes to do a weekly check. We cannot stop every nest robbery, in the same way police cannot stop every burglary. We have over 100 pairs of Ospreys now and we cannot have someone under every tree."

Record fines

Two egg collectors were each fined £90,000 after stealing birds' eggs on an Orkney nature reserve. Brothers Lee and Jamie MacLaren could face up to 2 years in jail if they fail to pay these fines, though they are currently appealing against the sentence. The previous highest fine for an egg collector was £16,000, reduced to £2,000 on appeal.

The brothers admitted 70 charges under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, including taking and possessing eggs and disturbing rare birds. They were seen acting suspiciously on moorland which forms part of an Orkney reserve. After observing the men for 2 days RSPB alerted a police wildlife liaison officer, Dave Dawson. PC Dawson called at the brothers' rented caravan with a search warrant. They initially denied being egg collectors, but PC Dawson found eggs in cardboard boxes.

They had targeted Hen Harriers, Merlins and Red-throated Divers and also had eggs from the nests of Curlew, Fulmar and Dunlin. Of the 31 eggs found, 17 were from specially protected birds. They had 2 complete clutches of Hen Harrier eggs and a complete clutch of Merlin and Red-throated Diver.

The sheriff told the brothers "The people of these islands are hospitable and care very much for their wildlife. You have abused both their hospitality and their care for wildlife". As well as fining each £90,000, he confiscated equipment, including binoculars, a climbing rope and inflatable dinghy. One brother told reporters "We haven't got the money, so we know we're going to be put away for a long time. Our egg collecting days are well and truly over".

Charles Frank

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Pesticides and farmland birds

The direct effect of pesticides on birds is now well known. Few people interested in the environment have not read, or at least heard of, Silent Spring, the book that will always be associated with the effects of some of the first modern chemicals on bird populations in the 1960s. Most SBN readers will know of the effects of pesticides, such as DDT, on birds and their eggs. However, DDT and many similar chemicals have been restricted for years. Is there still a problem? A study carried out on behalf of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee suggests that there is.

Trends in farmland bird populations

Data on 40 bird species breeding on farmland was obtained from the BTO's CBC and the 2 breeding bird atlases.

Twenty four species (7 of which are summer migrants) have declined and 16 (3 of which are summer migrants) are stable or increasing. Most of the thrushes and all of the buntings have declined on farmland. Most species that are declining on farmland and that occur also in woodland have declined in woodland.

Excluding scarce species such as Stone Curlew and Cirl Bunting, the most severely declining species are Tree Sparrow, Grey Partridge, Turtle Dove, Bullfinch, Song Thrush and Spotted Flycatcher, all of which have declined by more than 70% on farmland in the last 20-30 years. Four other species (Lapwing, Skylark, Linnet and Reed Bunting) have declined by more than 50% over the same period. The Corn Bunting, which is another predominatnly farmland species, has declined by 80% over all its habitats. Most of the species shown to be declining in the UK are also known to be declining in other north western European countries.

Changes in distribution were assessed from the data collected for the 2 breeding bird atlases, which covered the periods 1968-72 and 1988-91. Most species showed little or no change in distribution. However, atlas data will only start to indicate that declines have occurred in widespread species when decreases in abundance have been sufficient to cause local extinctions. For example, the contraction in range for the Skylark was only 2% between 1969 and 1991, although its CBC index on farmland decreased by about 58% over approximately the same period.

The limited available data on trends in wintering birds show similar patterns of decline for most of the species whose breeding populations are also in decline.

Although it is difficult to know when declines started, 11 appeared to start their recent declines in the period 1974-85. While a few species, such as Grey Partridge and Corn Bunting, have declined consistently

Tree Sparrow *Derek Robertson*

since 1900, the overall pattern has shifted from one of general increases in the periods 1900-39 and 1940-69 to much more obvious decreases during 1970-94. Though pigeons have increased throughout, the trend for seed eating passerines has changed from earlier increase to considerable decrease. Amongst the species that have increased, the populations of 2 (Pheasant and Red-legged Partridge) are known to be influenced by release schemes.

Farmland birds and their food supply

The majority of birds feed on a relatively wide range of invertebrates and/or plants. There were no obvious differences in the diets of declining or stable or increasing species. At certain times of year, and during chick development, some invertebrates are particularly critical, eg Sawfly larvae for partridge chicks.

There is some evidence of reductions in food abundance. Most invertebrate groups have declined or remained stable. There is also evidence of decline in a range of plant species. Some of these have moved from weed to near rarity status. Some of the declining plant groups, such as the cabbage family *(Cruciferae)*, are important in the diet of farmland birds. Some plant species such as Cleavers or Sticky Willie *Galium aparine* have increased. Although most of the common weed species are the same as those found 20 years ago, many more species have decreased in abundance than have increased.

There is clear evidence from a range of studies that the use of pesticides frequently results in considerable short term reductions in the abundance of both target and non target invertebrates and plants. Such effects may persist for weeks or months after the date of pesticide application. Such losses could be of considerable importance to birds, especially if they occur at critical periods of the year such as during chick rearing.

The use of pesticides in the UK

If modern pesticides are at least as effective in general terms at killing invertebrates and plants within the crop and have a similar breadth of activity as their predecessors,

the proportion of the area sprayed is likely to be a good measure of potential impact on the food of birds.

The proportion of the total cereal area that was sprayed increased for all 4 groups of pesticides and molluscides. Herbicide use exceeded 100% (indicating that average fields were sprayed more than once) by the mid 1970s and rose to more than 200% in the 1990s. Fungicide use increased from under 50% in the 1970s to 200% in the 1980s and close to 300% in the 1990s. Insecticide spraying, which can be more variable depending on outbreaks of pests, rose from a few percent in the early 1970s to a peak in 1990 of close to 100%. Although showing similar patterns of increased use, molluscicides were used relatively less frequently on cereal crops.

Eleven of the 12 declining bird species for which it was possible to identify when their population declines started began to decline during a period of high and increasing use of herbicides, fungicides and insecticides.

Detailed studies

The Organic Farming Project of the BTO and the Institute of Arable Crops Research included farms from a wide area of southern and eastern England. It was able to demonstrate greater numbers of some species of birds on organic than on conventional farms, and higher breeding density and productivity of Skylarks on organic fields. However, because this was a comparison of 2 farming systems it was not possible to determine the relative importance of pesticides against other factors such as habitat quality.

The most detailed research has been the Game Conservancy Trust's study on the Grey Partridge and its food in a 29 km sq study area in Sussex over a continuous period of almost 30 years. The possible role of pesticides in the decline of this gamebird has been a major focus of this work, which has also evaluated other factors such as cropping patterns and predation.

The study provides convincing evidence that partridge chick survival has been reduced by the indirect effects of herbicides and broad spectrum inbsecticides. The decline in chick survival, which may have been made worse by losses due to predation, has led to reductions in population density. Reduction of pesticide usage alone has been shown to result in significant improvements in chick survival.

There are more limited data from studies in England on 2 other species, the Linnet and the Corn Bunting, that are still relatively widespread but declining. In the Linnet the effects may be concealed by the fact that one important natural source of food. Charlock *Sinapis arvensis* has declined following widespread use of herbicides, but has been replaced by an artificial food source, Oilseed Rape *Brassica napus*. Work on the Corn Bunting has demonstrated its dependence on invertebrate prey during the breeding season. At one study site, greater breeding densities were found in a less intensive mixed farming situation than in a more intensively farmed area.

Cirl Bunting research, like that on the Grey Partridge, has demonstrated that the chicks of some species may be vulnerable to the effects of even short duration reductions of food, whether these result from the use of pesticides or the weather.

Work on setaside in Devon and East Anglia has shown the importance of weedy fields for a range of wintering farmland species. Setaside addresses several of the factors that are believed to be of importance for birds, notably the switch from spring to autumn cultivation and late summer or autumn applications of herbicides. It remains to be seen whether the obvious benefits of setaside to feeding winter birds have an effect on their survival that will eventually lead to population changes which are detectable through monitoring by the new Breeding Bird Survey.

What should be done?

Changes that might help to reverse declines in farmland birds are:

1. Increased use of narrow spectrum pesticides and similar techniques to minimise the impact of pesticides;

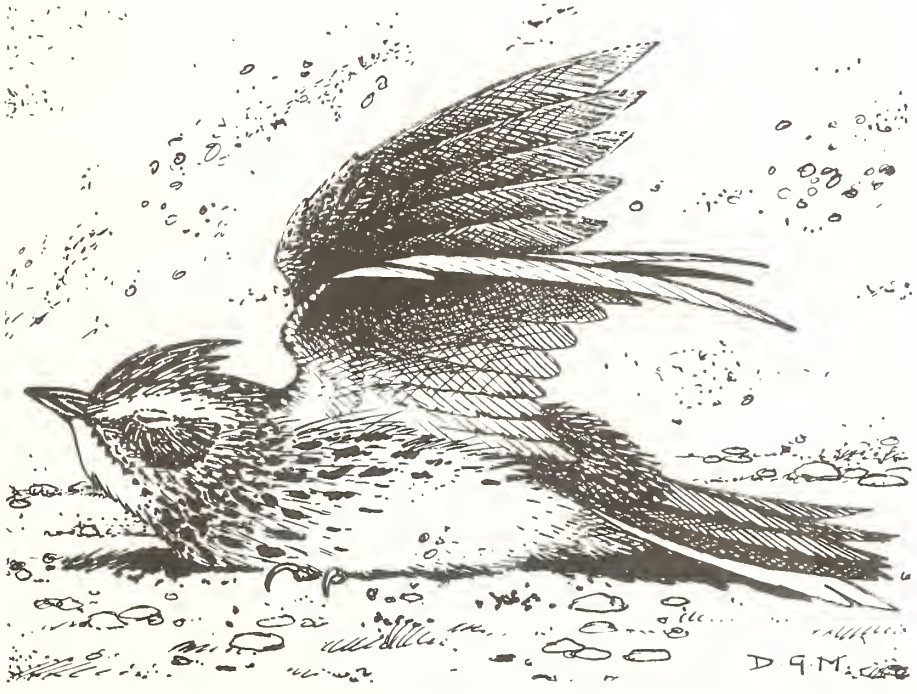
2. An integrated package of prescriptions in an agri-environment scheme. Although some of these prescriptions may involve reductions in pesticide use, many relate to other changes aimed at promoting species diversity.

3. Introduction of a successor to setaside that is sympathetic to farmland birds;

4. An increase in organic farming and/or a reversion to farming techniques of several decades ago.

Although "old-fashioned" farming would be likely to bring benefits to birds, it is not a realistic option on a large scale. None of the other options alone is likely to return farmland birds to their former abundance. However, if progress can be made on all of them, this is likely to lead to significant improvements.

This article is based on "The indirect effects of pesticides on birds" edited by L H Campbell & A S Cooke and published by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough. ISBN 1 86107 4417. A copy is in the Waterston Library.



Skylark dust bathing *David Mitchell*

Farming, birds and the European Union

One institution that was rarely referred to in a positive light in the recent General Election was the European Union. The attitude of the majority of UK politicians varied from open hostility to the urgent need for reform. In Britain the EU is generally seen as a wasteful bureaucracy that needs cutting down to size. Since agricultural support takes up by far the biggest part of the EU budget, it is frequently singled out as proof of the need for change. Although calls for change typically focus on saving money, reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) offers valuable opportunities for conservation in the wider countryside which could be lost if British politicians do not adopt a more constructive approach to European issues.

Why is farmland important?

Agriculture is the form of land use that affects nearly half of the total area of the EU. This makes it by far the most important in terms of area. Despite deterioration in the value of much farmland as wildlife habitat due to intensification, it still holds large numbers of birds - and other wildlife - including important populations of threatened species.

Farming has been changing the landscape of Europe since Neolithic times. However, the pace of change intensified enormously in the latter half of this century. Birds that were until recently considered common are now appearing on lists of conservation concern. In Britain monitoring shows that species such as Song Thrush, Skylark and several finches, buntings and sparrows have all declined. It is now thought that 195 species (38% of the European total) can be said to have declined sufficiently to raise concern over their conservation status. Farmland holds more of these species than any other habitat.

How has farming changed?

Farming has changed as new technology has become available. New and bigger machines, chemicals which increase yields or control weeds, pests and pathogens, new varieties of crops and livestock and new forms of husbandry have together made modern farming far more efficient in terms of how much food an area of land or a farm worker can produce. This process has been actively encouraged by individual governments as well as the EU. Its origins lie in the food shortages and rationing associated with the war years. When the European Common Market was created in the 1950s all the founding members agreed that self sufficiency in food should be a priority. This was achieved through a system of guaranteed prices for certain, but by no means all, agricultural products such as cereals, beef and sheep meat. The CAP provided incentives to farmers to use new methods, combine and enlarge fields and farmlands, all with a view to increased production.

All this proved spectacularly successful. Food production increased to the point where considerable sums have had to be spent on storing surpluses - the notorious food mountains and wine lakes.

What problems have developed?

In a post war Europe obsessed by the need for economic growth, it is not surprising that it took some time for the rationale of the CAP to be questioned. Many of the first criticisms were on the grounds of cost. The CAP now distorts the whole of the EU Budget. Concerns were also raised at the numbers of people leaving the land - even though at first this was seen as progress - and the effects of some modern farming practices on health and the welfare of livestock and the land itself. Not all of these are down to the CAP. Some recent food scares in this country - BSE and *E.coli* - appear to be largely of British origin though that has not stopped some politicians from trying to lay the blame at the EU door.

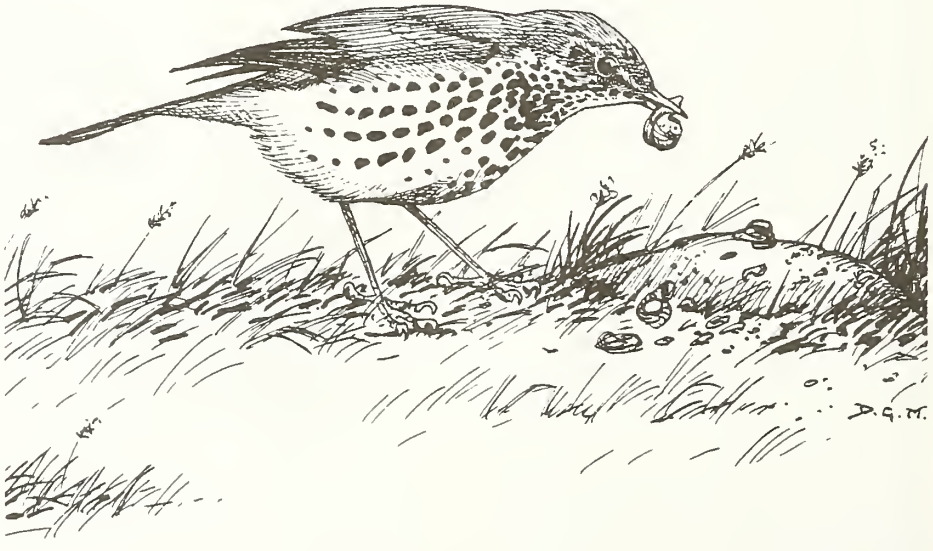
The net result is that concern over farming and food has never been greater. Only part of that concern relates to wildlife conservation but it is these particular concerns that are the basis for this article.

Effects on wildlife

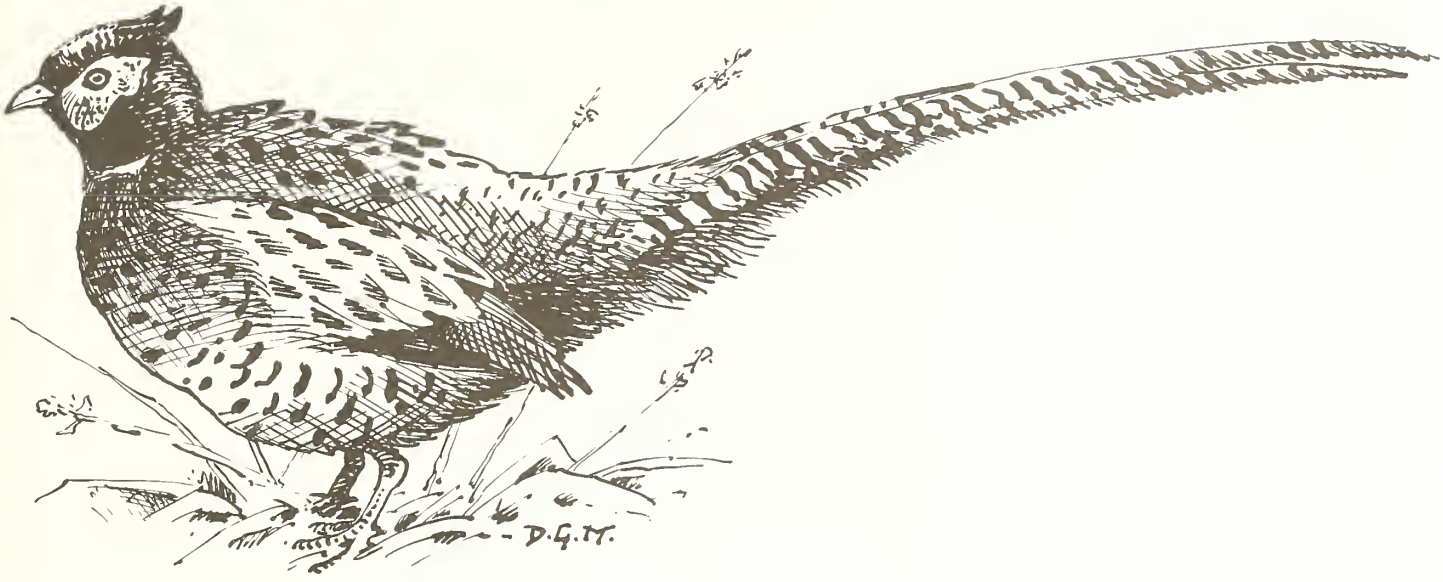
These can be summed up as a reduction in biodiversity. Bigger, 'cleaner' fields mean fewer weeds and invertebrates and fewer large creatures living in the fields. Change has affected both the land used directly for food production and the margins and edges which have become fewer and less valuable as habitats or refuges. Many of these effects are well known. In addition drainage, cultivation of traditional pasture, changes in the timing of cultivation (early ploughing means fewer winter stubbles) and increased specialisation, eg where cereals are grown year after year on the same land, have also affected wildlife. Many of these changes would never have occurred were it not for subsidies from the public purse.

Why concentrate on birds?

Birds are popular and relatively easy to watch so monitoring and other research is better developed for birds than other groups with useful historical data already available. Birds are, therefore, probably the most useful group to use as environmental monitors even though they may not be as sensitive as some other creatures to local changes. Also, changes in bird numbers



Song Thrush *David Mitchell*



Pheasant *David Mitchell*

often involve a time lag as environmental change first affects plants or small animals on which the birds depend.

Site protection

Most of us grew up with the idea that certain places were specially good for birds and therefore these should be made into nature reserves. That idea was then extended to the concept of SSSIs and the variety of other designations that now exist. Gradually, however, it has become apparent that trying to protect a patchwork of key sites is not sufficient. It can even be detrimental since it encourages the view that if so many hundred SSSIs exist then surely development can proceed unhindered everywhere else. Furthermore, attempts to designate areas of land big enough to cater for species such as eagles invariably provoke opposition.

How has the CAP been changing?

In response to political concern over cost and the likely effects of continuing with the CAP support system in an enlarged Europe containing East European countries, all with low per capita incomes and large numbers of small scale farms, reform has already started. Support has now been reduced, quotas for some products, eg milk, introduced and some land taken out of production, eg set aside. Even these reforms have led to considerable, sometimes violent, protests in several countries, demonstrating the political strength of the farmers in many parts of Europe.

For some time the EU has been sympathetic to proposals to integrate farming with conservation. As this often involves maintaining traditional methods which tend to be more labour intensive, this can be put forward as a social as well as an environmental policy. Taken together with the willingness of the EU to issue measures such as the Wild Birds Directive - often with greater enthusiasm than the UK Government - there have already been schemes of benefit to wildlife.

What should we look for in the future?

The pressure for reform of the CAP will grow. There is no doubt that further change will come. Conservationists should campaign for a change in emphasis on the way public money is spent in the countryside. An enormous amount could be achieved if even part of the money currently going into production support was aimed at supporting more environmentally friendly forms of agriculture. This could solve the problem of government agencies such as SNH, whose limited budget has to try to compensate farmers for not doing things on their land that other parts of government, such as DAFS, are paying them to do.

It is important that conservationists do more than just make well meaning noises about a traditional countryside. It is not realistic to expect all the old systems to come back. There is a need for research. Some of it can be done by amateurs, eg through atlas schemes or surveys such as the SOC/RSPB waders on farmland project to identify the areas and habitats worthy of support. There is also a need to cost schemes properly; one of the reasons for the present problems is that agriculture has been living in an artificial environment which in the long term benefits no-one, including the farmers, as their long term business interests are now at the mercy of short term political decisions.

It is important to remember political realities. There are demands for cut backs in spending throughout Europe. World food shortages are increasing and many of the food mountains have shrunk. There is something of a backlash against 'big government' and even conservation organisations, and it is salutary to look at what has happened in the USA where the political right has often successfully called for a low tax regime with minimal regulation and, therefore, less protection for the environment.

Well thought out policies are needed that integrate wildlife conservation with land use priorities that encourage the rural economy and allow people to make a living in the more attractive parts of the Scottish countryside.

Stan da Prato

For a detailed account of European farming policies and their effect on birds members should consult ***Farming and birds in Europe: the CAP and it implications for Bird Conservation*** *edited by Deborah Pain and Mike Pienkowski, published by Academic Press for the RSPB. £65 ISBN 0-12-544280-7 A copy is in the Waterston Library and proved very useful when compiling this article.*

Corn Bunting surveys in Fife

The 1996 Corn Bunting survey followed a severe winter, and showed a serious decline in the number of singing males from 120 to 90. Winter flocks of Corn Buntings were hard to find; in 1996-97 the highest count was 20 at the Knock of Nydie in February. At present about a dozen stalwarts have been doing the work. Corn Buntings stay in winter flocks until the end of April, so there is no point in starting to survey too soon. Best results follow from counting 2 hours after dawn or 2 hours before dusk. It often turns out that a surveyor will find half as many again if the search is at those times compared to mid morning or mid afternoon.

In recent years numbers have been sinking around St Andrews and the Eden Estuary, but holding up especially on the coast from Ardross round to Boarhills. Crail airfield is a particularly good spot. The area between Wormit and Leuchars is also very remarkable and has shown no decline, and the outlier to the west around Dunshelt holds up.

Let's hope for a better year in 1997!

Chris Smout

Capercaillie *Forestry Commission*

A new species for Scotland?

If not the world! *Scotland on Sunday* amazed readers in its issue of 11 May when it said RSPB had decided not to shoot the "*black-hooded crows ... which prey on capercaillie chicks ... in Abernethy*". Since no such bird exists anywhere in the world it is hardly surprising that shooting them would have been a pointless exercise.

Egg eating Blackbirds

In April a Blackbird nested in a Beech hedge in our garden in Scone in view of our lounge. After 2 days of cold weather, the nest appeared to have been deserted. It contained 2 or 3 eggs. The next morning I saw a male Blackbird in the nest, pecking at the eggs. A female chased him away, pecked at the eggs, started to eat their contents and also began to pull the nest apart. The male bird stayed close by. She tossed the eggs onto the ground and continued to eat the contents. The hen Blackbird which had laid the eggs built another nest and can be regularly seen at our bird table. I cannot say whether it was this hen which ransacked the nest.

Laura Lamont

Ruddy Duck reprieve

Plans to cull Ruddy Ducks have been cancelled despite support from ornithologists concerned that the increasing population of feral Ruddy Ducks will threaten the endangered White-headed Duck in southern Europe by interbreeding. The Department of the Environment say that Ruddy Ducks are to become a quarry species which can be shot, a compromise that is unlikely to solve the problem.

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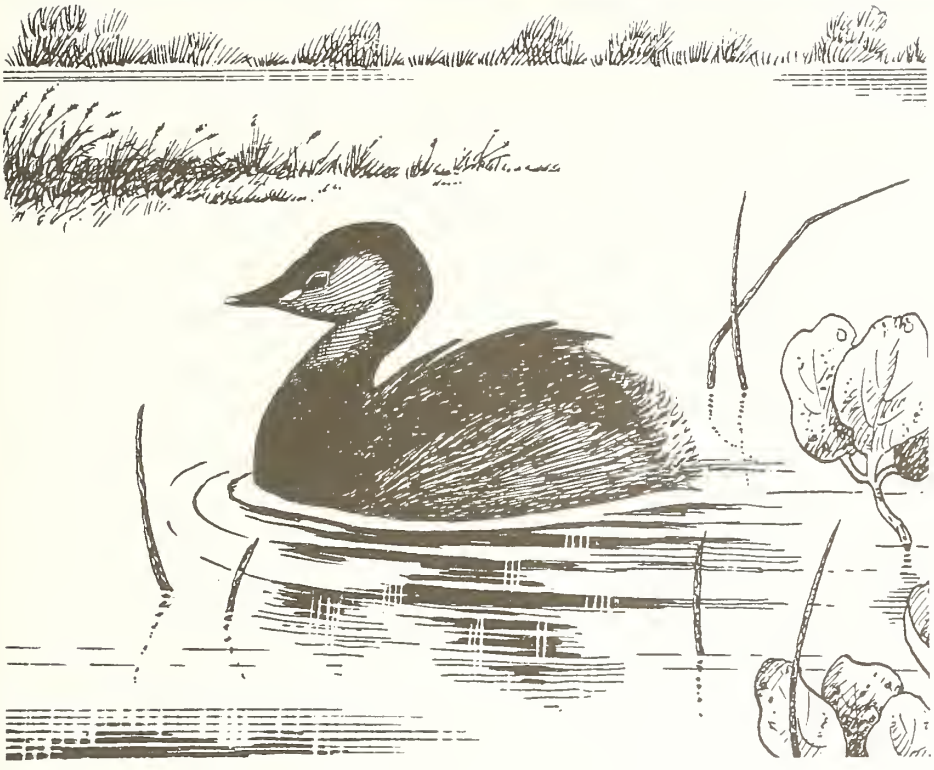


Little Grebe *David Mitchell*

New director for NTS

The National Trust for Scotland has a new director. Trevor Croft says NTS will continue to look after Scotland's built as well as natural heritage, but his ambition is to make the organisation "the premier conservation body in Scotland". NTS is already the second biggest private landowner in the country with more than 180,000 acres, and may buy more properties to ensure good management.

Mr Croft's appointment is seen as a sign of a new generation taking over a body once criticised for giving too high a priority to castles and stately homes. "We were rightly criticised for signposting the Lost Valley in Glencoe and putting the visitor centre half way up Ben Lawers. I would ask people to judge us on our record in recent years. Many now believe the trust has some of the best nature conservation policies in Scotland. More than 60% of our members join us because they want to support protection for the countryside".

The Heritage Lottery Fund and the millions it provides for purchases has given the public the idea that money is no longer an issue for NTS. However, that money is only available for capital purchases; it cannot be used for day to day management. The difficulty for the Trust is that its properties are under endowed.

Pace quickens on National Parks

At the end of May Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Link, a coalition of more than 20 bodies representing countryside, conservation and recreation interests which includes the SOC, called for the setting up of a new kind of 'top-tier' designation providing powers and resources to deal with the kinds of pressures faced by popular areas such as Loch Lomond and the Cairngorms.

Opinion polls have shown that over 80% of Scots support the creation of National Parks to protect our most important habitats.

Link member bodies were severely critical of the previous Conservative Government's review of designations which, despite ministerial undertakings to the contrary, did not consider the case for national parks. SWCL has now launched a discussion paper *Protecting Scotland's Finest Landscapes: A Call for Action on National Parks for Scotland* calls for commitment by Government to review as a matter of urgency the case for protection for Scotland's prime areas and to establish National Parks for Scotland in time for launch at the World Parks Congress 2002. A copy of the paper is in the Waterston Library.

First days with the Fife Branch

Being newly arrived in Fife, this was our first visit to the Birnie Loch Reserve. As we waited in the car park for other SOC members to arrive, we saw Sand Martins for the first time this year. We were soon joined by Jean, Donald and the local ranger, who proceeded to give us a guided tour while simultaneously carrying out a census of the reserve. The birds on the water were dominated by Black-headed Gulls and Mallard with fewer Pochard, Tufted Ducks, Teal and a pair of Gadwall. Donald heard a Water Rail calling, but, despite peering into the reeds from every possible angle, none of us managed to sight the elusive bird.

We bypassed the reserve's sole hide, which is not well positioned for observing birds and continued on to where a small stream feeds into the loch. Tony disappeared briefly before returning with a black tarry deposit on a few leaves in his hand, all in order to introduce us to the fine art of spraint sniffing! Spraints (or droppings) from Otters smell sweet and oily whereas those from Mink are musky and less pleasant. Luckily this one was from an Otter. It appeared to have been recently deposited but, like the Water Rail, we never actually saw the animal.

Walking on we had views of Ostriches, an Emu and a Cassowary in an adjoining field. We were told that many people actually pay several pounds to see these (non tickable) species. Re-entering the Birnie Loch area we made a final attempt to see the rail by walking out onto one of the spits of land, but only succeeded in scaring off a Reed Bunting.

After leaving Tony to carry on with his duties, the other 4 proceeded to Lindores Loch. We started off near the ruined Abdie church where we walked through the graveyard to get a better view of the reedbeds and were surprised to find human jaw bones emerging from the soil. Both the loch and the reedbeds were fairly quiet as far as birdlife was concerned, although we did get good views of Goldeneye, Great Crested Grebe, Dabchick and a couple of Cormorants. As we were about to call it a day Jean spotted a Buzzard flying onto a branch of a nearby tree where it spent some time preening itself.

Mike Walton and Fiona Butler

The first indoor meeting of Fife branch is on 17 September 1997

Red-throated Diver *Sidney Clarke*

Highland branch trip

Twelve of us met on a very damp, dreich morning, wondering why on earth we had put our names down for a weekend trip up north! However, nothing really dampens our enthusiasm and off we set heading for Lairg over the Struie and into the clouds.

We arrived in Lairg to find a Black-throated Diver swimming and feeding right in front of us and also 2 Otters playing over on the far side of the loch. Our bird list had reached 12 which wasn't bad considering the weather and 3 others joined the party.

We headed north towards Loch Hope. Wheatears, Golden Plover, Snipe and lots of Meadow Pipits were added to the list. Lunch was taken at the broch, with several Red Deer just up the hill and a couple of Twite round the side of the broch. Sandpipers were calling along the river, seemingly oblivious of the rain. At Loch Hope Willow Warblers were singing everywhere and we stopped to watch a pair of Whinchats. A Roe Deer was feeding quietly at the edge of the birches. We had a wander along the road in a slightly drier break and looked for Redstarts. Jeff heard one so now we know the call!

We headed for the causeway across the Kyle of Tongue. Arctic Terns were skimming over the water and 15 seals were heaved up on the sandbank. Eiders, Shags and a couple of Great Northern Divers, one in beautiful summer plumage, bobbed in the waves, along with a Tystie.

After a convivial evening in a guest house most of us got up for an 8 o'clock breakfast, though one member had been out since about half past 5 and seen Grasshopper Warbler and a Tawny Owl. After breakfast we joined forces at the causeway and headed west up into the clouds! No point in looking for Red-throated Divers on those high lochans! On down to sea level again to Loch Eriboll. The rain kept away and we had a pleasant walk. Four Ravens soared in the sky above the cliffs and a Robin was singing away. Meadow Pipits flitted among the rocks and we looked at various flowers along the track. A Golden Eagle was spotted by several members on the way back. We then drove on to Smoo cave. What an amazing place, a limestone area in the middle of the usual acidic rocks of the Highlands! The cave is well worth a visit, despite the climb down and back again. They have put in some spot lights to highlight the limestone formations.

We all joined up for lunch at Balnakiel then wandered over the golf course looking for *Primula scotica*. There were plenty of rosettes but none in flower - not surprising with all those sheep grazing on the course. Some saw a Whimbrel but not, alas, the one member of the party who desperately wanted to see one. Two cars stopped to look at the diver island on Loch Merkland. The island was bobbing up and down with the waves but the resident Black-throated Diver seemed unperturbed. This was the island the SOC had sponsored. It seemed so appropriate. On down to Lairg and across the bridge, the Black-throated Diver was still there but not the Otters. The heavens opened as we neared Inverness so we were really quite lucky with the weather in the end.

We all seemed to enjoy ourselves in spite of the rather inclement weather. I thought I'd better not organise another trip as the Islay trip was a bit wet too. However, maybe we'll head for Orkney or Eigg next year. Surely it won't rain a third time!

Janet Crummy

The first indoor meeting of Highland branch is on 16 September 1997

The cult of Aphrodite and the secrets of Sylvia

SOC Ayrshire Branch venture forth on a quest to unlock the myths and legends of Cyprus, drink lots of wine and see lots of birds.

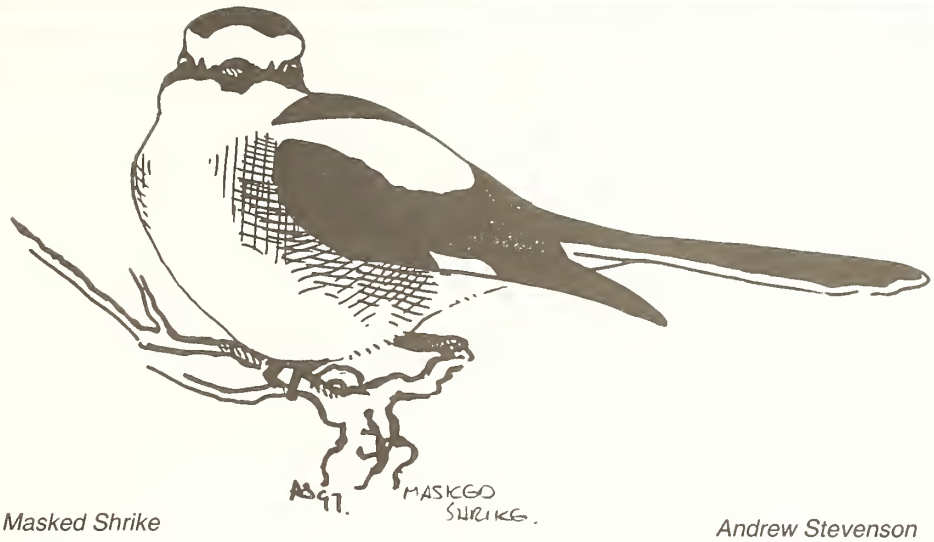
Birds in the sun

It was a sunny April afternoon as we made our approach to Paphos International Airport and, needless to say, before any foot had alighted on Cypriot soil, members of our party had already recorded Chukar, Black Francolin, Swift, Alpine Swift and Swallow as the aircraft taxied along the runway towards the terminal building.

We were soon relaxing at the Marion Hotel with a glass of beer in hand as we watched Great Spotted Cuckoo and Pallid Harrier from the steps of the hotel. As the walls of the hotel were home to hundreds of Spanish Sparrows, no wake up calls were needed! The first day was rounded off with a gentle stroll through the tranquil countryside in the warmth of the evening sun. Cyprus Pied Wheatears were flitting about and the explosive call of Cetti's Warbler surrounded us.

Our first full day on the island started at 07. 00 with a walk through orange groves and Eucalyptus trees to an azure blue sea. Marsh Harriers provided high level entertainment; lower down, Red-rumped Swallows skimmed over the fields and Sedge and Reed Warblers sang in the damper areas. After breakfast, we notched up Pied and Collared Flycatcher, Wryneck, Little Owl, Pallid Swift, Alpine Swift, Audouin's Gull, Olivaceous, Subalpine and

Black-winged Stilt *David Mitchell*



Masked Shrike *Andrew Stevenson*

Sardinian Warblers on the Akamas peninsula but Aphrodite, the Goddess of Love, was nowhere to be seen, having left only her cold bath water behind. Every evening in Polis we ate at the Lemon Garden Restaurant, where our host provided good local food and wine, even the tape of the Alexander Brothers did not deter us as we saw both the comet and Scops Owl.

Later we drove along unsurfaced mountain roads to the misty heights of Cedar Valley and Stavros tis Psokas, home to that elusive wild sheep, the Moufflon. We were lucky enough to see 5 of these lovely creatures, as well as our first Cyprus Coal Tit. We added Short-toed and Booted Eagle, Goshawk, Ruppell's Warbler and Masked Shrike as well as Cretzschmar's Bunting to our list.

Falls of migrants

One night brought severe electrical storms and high winds. Birdline Cyprus informed us of large falls of migrants around the Paphos lighthouse area. We saw in excess of a 1000 Yellow Wagtails (*M f feldegg*, *beema*, *flava* and *thunbergi*). Culture and tradition were not neglected with visits to the Mosaic Houses and the Tombs of the Kings, a World Heritage site.

Goddess of Love?

Monday 7 April was a day of high expectation. At 05.30 we set off along the coast to the birthplace of Aphrodite. It was here we found not our Goddess of Love, but the elusive *Sylvia*! Miss Melanothorax and her ardent suitor were singing away in the scrub surrounding the tourist pavilion.

At last, a pair of Cyprus Warblers! We could all breath a sigh of relief after the possibility of dipping on this endemic had been removed! We enjoyed breakfast of local cheese and coffee at a cafe before speeding off along the superb new motorway to Erimi and the former home of the Knights Templar - Kolossi Castle - on our way to Akrotiri Salt Lake. We saw 350 Greater Flamingos as well as Black-winged Stilts and various gulls and terns. Continuing past the RAF checkpoint we stopped to watch the Red
Arrows and had an excellent sighting of a Blue-cheeked Bee-eater. The Phassouri reedbeds were particularly good with Squacco Heron, Glossy Ibis, Quail, Great Snipe and Marsh Sandpiper. The highlight of the day was the sight of 9 Griffon Vultures at Kensington Cliffs.

Scottish songs

Our final day took us up to the snow line in the Troodos mountains where we saw Eleanora's Falcon and Long-legged Buzzard. Earlier we had stopped at Aspokremnos Dam and had excellent views of Little Crake and Crag Martin. Our last evening was a celebration of a fine week with superb company. The evening was rounded off with a selection of Scottish ballads, led beautifully by Mary Hogg and followed shakily by the rest of the company. The owner of the taverna had seen *Braveheart* 4 times!

The trip was a huge success introduced us to the Cypriot way of life and combined a birding trip with a superb holiday.

Tony Scott

The first indoor meeting of the Ayrshire branch is on 17 September 1997

REVIEWS

A Field Guide to the Birds of Armenia *by Martin S Adamian and Daniel Klem jr. 1997. American University of Armenia. 220pp. Hardback $44, Softback $39.*

This book covers the birds of Armenia one of the republics of the former USSR and approximately the size of Belgium. The national list stands at an impressive 346 species, all described in the book and illustrated on 61 colour plates. There are also maps giving information on distribution and abundance.

The book is nicely produced and in English, though with bird names also given in the local language (and alphabet!) as it is a project of the American University of Armenia which is affiliated to the University of California. Introductory pages give information on ornithology and conservation in Armenia. In practice the English bird names are largely based on Sibley & Monroe; this means, for example, that Common Buzzard is as we know it but Hen Harrier becomes Northern Harrier and so on.

This is a useful book but, given the political instability of the region it may not attract many foreign bird watchers especially as all the species can be seen elsewhere.

Stan da Prato

The Birds of Africa Vol 5, Thrushes to Puffback Flycatchers. *Urban, Fry & Keith. 1997. Academic Press. 600pp. £99 hardback. ISBN* 0-12-137305-3.

Volume 1 of this series appeared in 1982, and later volumes have appeared at regular 4-5 year intervals. Two further titles are announced (Babblers-Buntings). It appears to be the *BWP* of Africa. Firmly recommended to anyone seriously interested in Afircan birds. All 5 volumes are available at a 15% discount.

John Law

Dumfries and Galloway Birdwatching

This is an excellent - free - booklet combining useful maps with easy to follow guides to the best and most accessible birdwatching sites for the visitor to Galloway. The booklet can be obtained from **Dumfries and Galloway Council Countryside Ranger Service, Environment and Infrastructure, Planning Services, Kirkbank, English Street, Dumfries DG1 2HS. Tel. 01398 260184.**

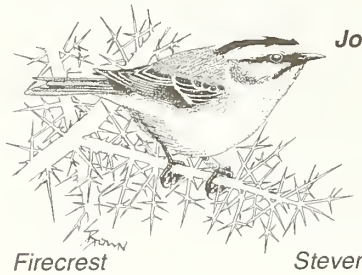
Pamela Black

Montagu's Harrier *by Roger Clarke. 1996. Arlequin Press. 208pp. £18.95 ISBN 1 900159 35 X*

Britain is on the NW edge of this species' range, with breeding pairs averaging single figures. Yet its preferred habitat is varied - marsh, moor, downs and arable crops - and it has bred once in Scotland since WW2 so could turn up again, almost anywhere.

This book covers all the usual aspects on a world wide basis, and is a creditable start to a new monograph series. There are frequent comparisons with other harrier species, and a brief discussion of possible long term effects of habitat intervention in the supposed interests of conservation and breeding. Recommended.

John Law



Firecrest *Steven Brown*

Other books received

Where to watch birds in Cumbria, Lancashire & Cheshire. *J Guest & M Hutcheson 2nd Edit. 224pp £12.99 ISBN 0-7136-4479-6*

Where to watch birds in Scotland. *M Madders & J Welstead. 3rd Edit. 332pp. £12.99 ISBN 0-7136-4487-7*

Where to watch birds in Devon & Cornwall including the Isle of Scilly & Lundy, *by David Norman and Vic Tucker, Helm. £12.99 ISBN 0-7136-4293-9*

Fragile Environments; The Use and Management of Tentsmuir NNR, Fife. *Edited by Graeme Whittington. 106pp £9.99 ISBN 1-898218-77-3*

Atropos, *edited by Mark Tunmore & Josh Nelson, 36 Tinker Lane, Meltham, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire HD7 3EX. Number 2 January 1997. £5 from above address.*
Atropos is the UK's premier journal for Lepidoptera and Odonata enthusiasts and is a must for anybody interested.

Journals etc for sale

We have a large selection of back numbers of British and overseas journals, reports, magazines, for sale. Please send details of your requirements, or an sae for a summary list to **The Librarian, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT or Fax 0131 558 9947.**

RSPB Photo Library goes on-line

Photographs of birds and other wildlife held by the RSPB can now be accessed via the Internet. A joint venture with Interface Digital Library in London, RSPB Images on-line picture service allows direct access to more than 50,000 wildlife and environmental photographs.

The digital photo library enables users to view low resolution images and then obtain the chosen images in high resolution. These can be delivered digitally via an ISDN line, or by other magnetic media such as an optical disc, Syquest cartridge or floppy disc. Hard copies of images, eg colour photographs and transparencies, are also available on request.

RSPB Images can be accessed via the Internet on **www.rspb-images.co.uk** Clients without computer links can still order RSPB photographs by ringing **RSPB Images on 010071 608 7325.**

Lothian Bird Report 1995

This is now available from *21 Regent Terrace, cost £5.00 plus 50p postage* or at Lothian branch meetings.

Highland Bird Report 1995

The 1995 Highland Bird Report listing 246 species and covering Inverness-shire, Ross-shire and Sutherland is now available from **Colin Crooke, c/o RSPB, North Scotland Office, Etive House, Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW.** at a cost of £4.50 plus 50p postage.

Birds - original colour slides
SAE for current list and prices to:-
Vanellus Presentations,
44 Southgrove Road, Sheffield S10 2NQ Tel (0114) 2664362

Fiftieth anniversary celebrations for Fair Isle

In 1998 the Bird Observatory will have been on Fair Isle for 50 years. We intend to celebrate this fantastic achievement. In doing so, we will remember George Waterston and his first 'Friends of Fair Isle', who set up FIBOT, with admiration and affection.

During the year, we will be organizing various anniversary events. On 28 August 1948 there was a party for the islanders at the Observatory. Fifty years to the day we

intend to host another island party as a sincere thank you to the islanders for all their help and encouragement over the years.

We will also hold our AGM on the island on 1 June 1998 to coincide with the date that Ken and Esther Williamson arrived to set up the Bird Observatory. We will keep you informed of other proposals as they are confirmed.

We hope that many of our present Friends may wish to join us on Fair Isle in 1998. In order to help you, we will give Friends priority booking. Usually, bookings for the following year are taken from 1 July; in the case of 1998, we will take bookings for Friends of Fair Isle from 1 June 1997 (2 months ahead of other prospective visitors).

We also hope to set aside special weeks for ex FIBO staff in August 1998 - so if you want to arrange a week with a group of ex staff, please contact Mark Newell at the Observatory as soon as possible.

Of course, we'd also be delighted to see Friends on the island this year (in fact, there's a special 20% discount for Friends in August 1997) and please remember to encourage others to come and enjoy the delights of Fair Isle. There's usually plenty of room!

Roy Dennis, Chairman,
Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust

Readers who wish more information on the activities of FIBOT should write to Fair Isle Bird Observatory, Fair Isle, Shetland ZE2 9JU

REQUESTS

House Martin counts

L A (Sandy) Hill of 32 Hillside Drive, Gratham, Lincs N631 7EZ is coordinating counts of House Martin nests. If you have any, please send them to him with brief details of the location.

Census of native Scottish Greylag Geese

A complete census of 'native' Scottish Greylag Geese *Anser anser* is currently underway. Organised counts have been undertaken during August/September 1997 primarily on Coll and Tiree, the Outer Hebrides, and Sutherland and Caithness. However, Greylag Geese also appear in small numbers in other areas of north and west Scotland. I would welcome any sightings of Greylag Geese from any areas to the west of the Great Glen (eg West Sutherland, Wester Ross, Skye and any other inner Hebridean islands not mentioned above, west Argyll and Bute, etc.) from **August or September** (before the Icelandic wintering birds arrive!). Please note date, location, flock size, habitat type, crop (if known) and please make a note of any coloured leg rings or collars seen and forward to: **Carl Mitchell, WWT, Slimbridge, Glos. GL2 7BT**
Thank you in advance.

Colour ringed Shags

For many years Shags breeding on the Isle of May in the Firth of Forth have been colour ringed with yellow rings engraved with two letters. In 1997 as many as possible of the 500 or so young which are expected to be reared there will be marked with white rings engraved with 3 letters. In addition, adults of known age will be marked with similar but red rings. This is a joint project between the Isle of May Bird Observatory, the University of Glasgow and ITE into (a) the short term survival of chicks of known parentage and (b) the age of first breeding. Although adult Isle of May Shags usually winter within 150 km of the colony, juveniles disperse widely along North Sea coasts and even inland. We would welcome sightings of any colour ringed Shag and will supply details of the individuals involved. Please report to: **Mike Harris, Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, Hill of Brathens, Banchory, Kincardineshire, AB31 4BY. Phone 01330-823434 Fax 01330-823303 Email m.p.harris@ite.ac.uk.**

Colour marked Oystercatchers

Sightings of yellow dye marked Oystercatchers, especially their breeding locations, will be greatly appreciated by: **Pat French, Grianan, Strone Road, Newtonmore, Inverness-shire PH20 1BA. Telephone 01540 673719**

Wing tagged Hen Harriers, Colour ringed Ring Ouzels, Colour ringed Stonechats, Colour ringed Mute Swans and Colour ringed Reed Buntings

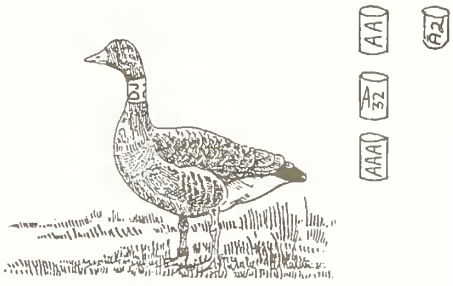
see *SBN* 43: page 15

Wing tagged Red Kites and Sea Eagles

see *SBN* 40: pages 3 & 14

Colour marked Greylag Geese

Sightings of Greylags bearing dye marks, darvic rings or neck collars, together with details of colours and letters seen, no matter how incomplete, should be sent to: **Bob Swann, 14 St Vincent Road, Tain, Ross-shire IV19 1JR (01862 894329)**



This is DJ - collars should be read from the bottom up.

SOC NOTICES

Scottish Birds Records Committee election of new member

In 1990 SBRC commenced a rotation with one member now retiring annually. Ken Shaw is due to stand down at the end of this year and to fill the vacancy the Committee is nominating Colin Crooke, who lives in Inverness. Colin is the Local Recorder for Highland (Inverness and Ross) and an active birdwatcher. He is also a professional ornithologist being employed by the RSPB.

Further nominations to fill the vacancy are invited and should be submitted to me by 31 October, being signed by both a proposer and a seconder who must both be SOC members. If there should be more than one nomination, a postal ballot will take place, in which all SOC Local Recorders will be eligible to vote.

Ron Forrester, Secretary, SBRC, 31 Argyle Terrace, Rothesay, Isle of Bute PA20 0BD

Visiting Norwegian ornithologist

Karl Birger Straan, a well known Norwegian ornithologist, is visiting Scotland during November and will give a talk at the Scottish Ringers' Conference at Braemar over the weekend 15/16 November. He will also be giving a talk to the Grampian branch of the SOC about the "Birds of Northern Norway" on Monday 17 November in the Sportsman's Club, 11 Queens Road, Aberdeen at 1930hrs. It is hoped that as many members as possible will turn out to hear Karl and make his stay in Scotland as memorable as possible.

Subscription increase

Council at their meeting in June agreed the recommendation of Management to increase subscription rates. Subscriptions have not been increased since 1992 and the Club has been running at a modest deficit. Against this background it was felt that a small increase is necessary. Details of the new rates are on the enclosed membership renewal notices.

Ian M Darling, President

Annual Conference

The 1997 Annual Conference will be at the Balavil Sport Hotel, Newtonmore from 31 October to 2 November 1997. The varied programme kicks off on the Friday evening with a light hearted talk by Ken Shaw followed by the usual slide show in which members may show a small selection of slides. Sir John Lister Kaye starts off the Saturday lectures which include topics such as the findings of 2 separate studies on the Hen Harrier, Waders in the Uists problems caused by Hedgehogs, Capercaillie and Black Grouse, Crested Tits, Mersehead and the Eden Estuary reserves, and the start of Fair Isle's 50th anniversary in 1998. There will be excursions to the RSPB Abernethy reserve on the Saturday afternoon and entertainment on Saturday evening.

The enclosed booking contains the full conference programme and should be returned to **21 Regent Terrace by 3rd October 1997.**

Please also support the annual raffle which is being run this year by our Ayr branch. All monies, ticket stubs and any additional prizes should be sent to **Bill McKechnie, Grimgrew Cottages, Dumfries Estate, Cumnock, Ayrshire KA1 8NJ** or brought to the conference.

Photographic competition

Entries for this year's competition should be sent to **21 Regent Terrace not later than 17th October 1997.** Slides, prints, colour or black and white are acceptable. Prizes in the form of book tokens are awarded to the best 3 entries. Photographers should make sure that their entries are clearly labelled with their name, address and the species and locality concerned. Subjects must be wild birds photographed in Scotland and, where appropriate, licences should have been obtained. The judges are particularly keen to see photographs of common species away from the nest. Material will be returned as soon as possible after the conference.

200 Club

Winners in the second quarter of 1997 were:

April - 1st £30 T McGeorge; 2nd £25 R Smith, Lockerbie; 3rd £20 A Shepherd, Dundee; 4th £10 D Shepherd, Dundee.
May - 1st £50 A Insh, Hamilton; 2nd £30 G Harper, Edinburgh; 3rd £20 C Thin, Edinburgh; 4th £10 T Poyser, Waterhouses.
June - 1st £30 M Draper, Glasgow; 2nd £20 R Caldow, Glasgow; 3rd £10 R Youngman, Pitlochry.

In the 200 Club's 8th year, which ended on 31 May, £1095 was returned in prizes and the SOC benefited similarly. This is the largest sum to date and is entirely due to member's generosity, for which the SOC is most grateful. Any SOC member wishing to join now for the rest of the "year" can send me a cheque for £9, payable to 'SOC 200 Club', which will be gratefully acknowledged. **Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL. (Tel. 01896 822176).**

New SOC recorders for Argyll, Lewis & Harris and Caithness

With effect from 31 August 1997 **Tristan ap Rheinallt** will relinquish the post as recorder for **Argyll**, we would like to thank him for his contribution over the years and wish him well for the future. We would also like to welcome the new recorder **Paul Daw, Tigh-na-Tulloch, Tullochgorm, Minard, Argyll PA32 8YQ** to the SOC recorders network. Paul has recently moved to Argyll from north Yorkshire where he assisted with the collation of records for the Harrogate Natural History Society Bird Report, so he is no stranger to the production of bird reports.
Peter Cunningham, our longest serving recorder (almost 20 years), has unfortunately decided to call it a day and hand over the reigns to **Brian Rabbits, 6 Carinish, Lochmaddy, North Uist HS6 5HL.** Peter was the recorder for **Lewis & Harris**. Brian has already taken over as recorder for the **Uists** from **Tim Dix** and has kindly agreed to add Lewis & Harris to his remit. We wish Peter all the best.
Peter Miller has kindly taken over as recorder for **Caithness** from **Eric Maughan**. We would like to thank Eric for all the work he has put in over the years, and wish him well; we also welcome Peter to the fold. His address is: **10 Harrald Cottages, Reiss, Wick, Caithness.**

Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club. It is published 4 times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices need to be sent to the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace no later than 5 weeks before publication. The magazine acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and to disseminate information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. The views expressed in articles in *Scottish Bird News* are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication. The SOC also publishes the journal *Scottish Birds* which publishes original papers and notes on Scottish Ornithology and the *Scottish Bird Report*. For details of these publications and membership contact the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

Discussion Group 1997

The South East Scotland Discussion Group meets monthly in the Library at 21 Regent Terrace to talk about local issues. All members are welcome. Meetings start at 7.30 pm. The dates are: 3 September, 1 October, 5 November and 3 December.

Index for Scottish Birds

Thanks to Robert Dickson's hard work the Index for Volume 18 is enclosed with this mailing.

With this issue

Enclosed with this issue are the *Scottish Bird Report, Raptor Round Up, Scottish Birds Volume 18 Index,* winter meetings programme, winter excursions, Report of Council/Accounts, Conference programme, raffle tickets and renewal notices.

Thanks to

Thanks are once again due to the many willing volunteers who come in every quarter and stuff envelopes. The stuffers for the June mailing were: Bob & Betty Smith, Noreen Stabler, Rosemary Davidson, Joan Wilcox, Hetty Harper, Myra Sutter, Ian Craig, John & Elisabeth Law and Geoffrey Harper. Thanks also to Brent Hurley for the Osprey drawing on page5 in our last issue.

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BIRD

THE SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Scottish Bird News

DECEMBER 1997 No. 48
ISSN 0268-3199

Edited by Stan da Prato
Assisted by Pamela Black, Sylvia Laing and Joan Wilcox

SMITHSONIAN
JAN 23 1998
LIBRARIES

Lessons from Langholm

The keenly awaited report on what has become known as the Langholm study into the effects of birds of prey on Red Grouse numbers was published at the end of October, just before the SOC Conference. One of the authors, Steve Redpath, was the first speaker on Saturday morning and the subject was the major theme of our conference. Much of this issue of SBN is dedicated to the issue of predator prey relationships particularly on grouse moors.

Controversy

Birds of prey are of great conservation interest, while grouse are important to the economy of many estates. The persecution of birds of prey is difficult to prove but undoutedly widespread - this has led to conflict between conservation and grouse shooting interests.

So far, debate on the issue has been marked by strongly held opinions and a shortage of scientifically based information. It was for this reason that the study was started. Its aim was to assess the impact of raptors on the numbers and bags of grouse over a 5 year period. The study was centred at Langholm, on land belonging to Buccleuch Estates. The areas had been managed as a high quality grouse moor since the last century and, until the start of the study, annual bags had tended to fluctuate with peaks every 6 years or so. Additional studies were made on five other moors in Scotland. On most of the moors concerned, as on many other moors, grouse bags had been declining for several decades.

Collaborative venture

The research was a collaborative venture, undertaken jointly by the Game Conservancy Trust and the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, but funded by a consortium that included the RSPB, SNH, JNCC and the Buccleuch and Westerhall Estates. In addition, the study drew on previous research on Red Grouse, undertaken by the Game Conservancy and the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology.

Rigorous protection

Throughout the study, all raptors in the Langholm area were rigorously protected and allowed to breed freely, while other legally controllable predators, notably Foxes and Crows, were killed as usual. The estate gamekeepers thus played a significant role in the study. The main raptors were Hen Harriers and Peregrines.

Male Hen Harrier *Arthur Gilpin*

The ideal scientific approach would have been experimental, comparing grouse numbers at Langholm, where raptors were protected, with grouse numbers in similar areas from which raptors were removed, reversing the treatments after some years. However, this procedure was considered both impractical and unacceptable. Instead a non experimental approach was adopted, measuring everything considered necessary to assess the impact of raptors. The scientists did have the benefit of bag records from 2 other moors in the same region, where raptors were much scarcer than at Langholm, perhaps due to illegal persecution but where the annual bags had previously fluctuated in parallel with those at Langholm.

Each year from 1992-96, the abundance of grouse, songbirds (mainly Meadow Pipits) and small mammals (mainly Field Voles) was estimated and the breeding success and diet of Hen Harriers and Peregrines was monitored. Grouse mortality and raptor hunting behaviour was also studied, in addition to measuring a number of habitat features. Records of grouse bags were examined to see how the number of grouse shot changed in the presence of breeding raptors.

Habitat changes

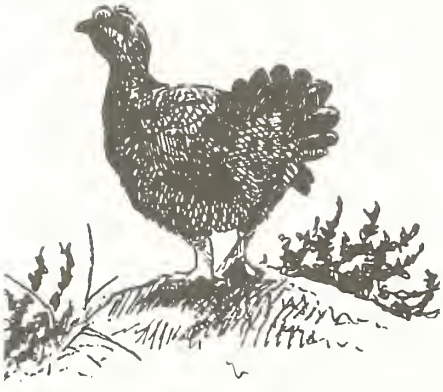
Aerial photographs showed that 48% of heather dominant vegetation was lost from Langholm moor between 1948 and 1988, mostly at lower altitudes. This loss of heather and consequent increase in grass were attributed to heavy grazing by sheep. Grouse bags on the same moor have shown a consistent and significant downward trend since 1913, and have also shown 6 year fluctuations with the last peak in 1990. Given that raptor breeding densities were thought to be very low before 1990, it is extremely unlikely that raptors were responsible for either the long term decline or the fluctuations in grouse bags.

Increasing raptors

On 4 study moors, the average density of breeding harriers increased for 4 years following protection from suspected illegal killing and other interference. From 1992-96, harrier numbers at Langholm increased from 2 to 14 breeding females. Peregrine numbers were more constant, although at Langholm numbers increased from 3 to 5 or 6 pairs.

Raptor predation

In each year, raptor predation in spring removed on average 30% of the potential breeding stock of grouse, and in the summers of 1995 and 1996 harrier predation removed on average 37% of grouse chicks. Most of these adult and chick losses were probably additional to other forms of mortality, and together reduced the numbers of grouse at the end of each breeding season by around 50%. In each year, raptors also killed on average 30% of the grouse between October and March, but it was not possible to determine what proportion of these grouse would have survived in the absence of raptors. A simple, mathematical model of the grouse population at Langholm, combining the estimated reduction in breeding productivity with observed density dependence in winter loss, predicted that over 2 years, in the absence of breeding raptors, grouse breeding number would have increased by 1.3 times and post breeding numbers would have increased by 2.5 times.



Red Grouse *RSPB*

Throughout the study, grouse density on Langholm moors in July averaged 33 birds per 0.5 km^2 and numbers did not change significantly from year to year. Grouse bags did not peak in 1996 as expected from past records. In contrast, bags on 2 other nearby moors, which had previously fluctuated in synchrony with those at Langholm, increased to high levels in 1996. These moors held only low densities of raptors. Predation by much larger numbers of raptors at Langholm was considered the most likely explanation for the continued low grouse density and low grouse bags on this moor during the study period. Bags on other moors where raptors were protected did not exhibit the same patterns observed at Langholm. This was either because raptor numbers remained at low density, or because driven shooting was already not viable by the time raptor protection occurred.

Habitat variation and raptor numbers

Where raptors were not persecuted, breeding densities of Hen Harriers and Peregrines varied considerably between different moors and were not primarily related to grouse densities. The highest breeding densities of harriers occurred on moors where Meadow Pipits and small mammals were most abundant. These prey appeared to prefer moors with a high ratio of grass to heather. This mosaic of heather and grassland is now typical of many moors in the Borders and northern England with heavy sheep grazing. Such conditions are less likely to occur on moors with almost continuous heather cover, which are now found mainly in the Highlands. Peregrine breeding densities were lower in the Highlands than in the north of England, probably because of differences in the abundance of pigeons, their main prey. In the absence of persecution it seems that raptor numbers will be greater on southern rather than northern moors and on moors with a high ratio of grass to heather. Extrapolating from data on harrier and Peregrine diet, the authors concluded that the impact of raptor predation within moors will be greatest when grouse densities go below approximately 12 pairs per km^2.

Conclusions

The Langholm study will certainly not end the controversy! Already, some shooting interests are quoting it as evidence for the need to reduce raptor numbers. Not surprisingly, conservationists do not agree. They have already pointed out that the effect of Hen Harriers and Peregrines is probably higher on some estates than others and that the Langholm habitat provides a situation where the effects of raptors on grouse are at their greatest.

This in turn raises several questions. Why was Langholm chosen? It seems that the fact that Buccleuch Estates protected their raptors was a major factor. There is a clear need to do more work in different habitats, notably as one heather moor in the study with less grass on it supported good grouse shooting in 1996 (and 1997) even when birds of prey were protected. However there can be no doubt that some keepers and landowners will regard Langholm as all the proof they want that raptors do need to be controlled and there will be continued pressure for the law to be changed to allow this.

The SOC's position has always been that, as ornithologists, we welcome good field work. Many birdwatchers will be surprised, even shocked, that some of their favourite birds can have a greater effect on game birds than many had anticipated at least in some circumstances. However, we are discussing semi-natural habitats managed by man to provide a crop - the grouse - and it has been known for some time that predators such as Corvids, Foxes, Stoats and Weasels can reduce the numbers of game birds in some habitats eg Partridges on farmland. It would be fascinating to have some idea of what the relations between raptors and game birds were like when the Scottish uplands were in a more natural state. It is worth explaining that, contrary to what is often claimed, Sparrowhawk do not depress songbird populations; this seems to be a more typical predator - prey relationship than the grouse moor situation. In the meantime, ornithologists should continue to point out that careful reading of the Langholm Report draws attention to those factors such as habitat management that we have always agreed are crucial and that at no point do its authors recommend culling of rare raptors as a justified conclusion from their work. With UK populations of under 600 pairs (2% of European population) and 1300 (14% of the European population) Hen Harriers and Peregrines are still so scarce as to be classified as Birds of Conservation Concern and specially protected under UK and by the European Union law, unlike Red Grouse whose population at the start of the shooting season is over a million birds. Given that other poorer countries still maintain populations of much larger predators such as big cats, bears and wolves, it is not too much to ask that Scotland maintains a healthy population of predatory birds.

Stan da Prato

The full report ***Birds of Prey and Red Grouse*** *by S M Redpath and S J Thirgood, with a forward by Professor Ian Newton and the Earl of Dalkeith is a 148 page document, published by The Stationery Office at £18. A copy is in the Waterston Library.*

The effects of illegal killing and nest destruction on Hen Harriers in Scotland

The Journal of Applied Ecology 34:1081-1105 published this important paper by Brian Etheridge, Ron Summers and Rhys Green this year. We reproduce a summary of its main findings as they are clearly relevant to the major theme of this issue of SBN but not readily available to all members.

This study recorded breeding productivity, natal dispersal and survival of Hen Harriers between 1988 and 1995 on grouse moors, other moorland and young conifer forest in the uplands of Scotland.

Nesting success was much lower on grouse moors than on other land. Annual productivity was 0.8 fledglings per breeding female per year on grouse moors compared with 2.4 on other moorland and 1.4 in young conifer forests. Human interference was recorded on half of the grouse moor estates studied and accounted for at least 30% of breeding failures on this land. It was much less frequent on other land.

Annual survival of female Hen Harriers which bred on grouse moors was about half that of females breeding on other moorland. On grouse moors, survival of females which bred unsuccessfully was much lower (15%) than that of females which reared at least one fledgling (92%). Survival of breeding females on other moorland was high and unrelated to breeding success (77%). The difference in survival of breeding females between grouse moors and other moors was attributed to killing by humans. On average, 55-74 females were killed each year, 11-15% of the total population of breeding females in Scotland, excluding Orkney.

The population of breeding females on grouse moors was estimated to decline rapidly without immigration. Harriers breeding on other habitats were producing a surplus of females recruits approximately sufficient to compensate for the losses on grouse moors. Most females started to breed at 1 year old and most males at 2 years old. The percentage of breeding males which were 1 year old was higher on grouse moors than on the other land management classes.

The median disperesal distance of young of both sexes exceeded 10km. Harriers fledged from one land management class were often found breeding in another. Moorland managed for grouse shooting was a sink habitat which received two thirds of its female recruits from other habitats.

The difference in productivity and survival between grouse moors and other habitats was attributed to illegal human interfence. The authors speculate that, without persecution, the Hen Harrier population in Scotland would increase, initially by about 13% per year, until a new, but unknown equilibrium level is reached.

Hen Harrier *K H C Taylor*

Breeding Hen Harriers in the UK 1997

There is concern amongst Raptor Study Groups and others that we have all been quoting a figure of 670 breeding pairs of Hen Harrier in the UK, which relates to the last national survey undertaken in 1988-89, whereas many feel that this over estimates the current breeding population. Meanwhile, the pro control lobby have been claiming far higher numbers.

It is hoped that another, complete national survey will be attempted in 1998, when a more accurate assessment of the breeding population should be possible.

In an effort to obtain a best estimate of the total breeding population for 1997, key Hen Harrier workers were approached and asked so far as possible to give an actual figure for their own patch, and to make a best estimate for possible additional, but unknown, pairs for areas that were incompletely covered.

This means that in, 1997, in terms of the known Hen Harrier population and potential breeding habitat, there was a minimum of 465 breeding attempts, with a projected additional 62 possible, giving a maximum breeding population of around 527 'pairs' (harriers breeding attempts are not always made by one male and one female). Significantly, this information was provided by the same group of fieldworkers who were involved with the 1998-89 survey. Their assessment suggests that there may have been a decline of up to 30% in the breeding Hen Harrier population since the earlier survey most particularly in Scotland. It adds weight to the concern raised by R Clarke & A D Watson The Hen Harrier Winter Roost Survey *The Raptor (Journal of the Hawk & Owl Trust)* (1997) with regard to a decline in numbers of Hen Harriers at monitored winter roosts which showed a 56% decline in Scotland since 1988-89. It must be emphasised that a high proportion of these breeding attempts were unsuccessful, many as a result of illegal persecution.

The fact is that there are now significantly fewer breeding Hen Harriers than 10 years ago. There are now more breeding Corncrakes than Hen Harriers!. It is ridiculous to argue that such a scarce bird should be controlled and ornithologists should point these facts out at every opportunity.

Donald Watson & Chris Rollie

Breeding Hen Harriers in 1997

		Confidently known	Possible
Totals =	Scotland	340	397
	England	26	
	Wales	24	
	N Ireland	35	40
	Isle of Man	40	
	UK total	**465**	**527 pairs (or breeding attempts)**

Raptor persecution in Scotland 1996

The RSPB's annual report on this topic states that, of a total of 273 reports received by the RSPB, 141 incidents involved birds of prey. Of these 141 cases, 92 related to shooting and illegal trapping and 49 involved the use of poisons. Such incidents were almost entirely restricted to game shooting areas.

Amongst the birds of prey illegally killed were a White-tailed Eagle, a Golden Eagle, 24 Buzzards, 5 Hen Harriers 3 Peregrines and a Long-eared Owl. As always these figures are likely to be the tip of the iceberg. The level of illegal persecution of Scotland's birds of prey remains unacceptably high. Despite public statements by shooting organisations the illegal killing of birds of prey is almost entirely restricted to parts of the country where game shooting is practised.

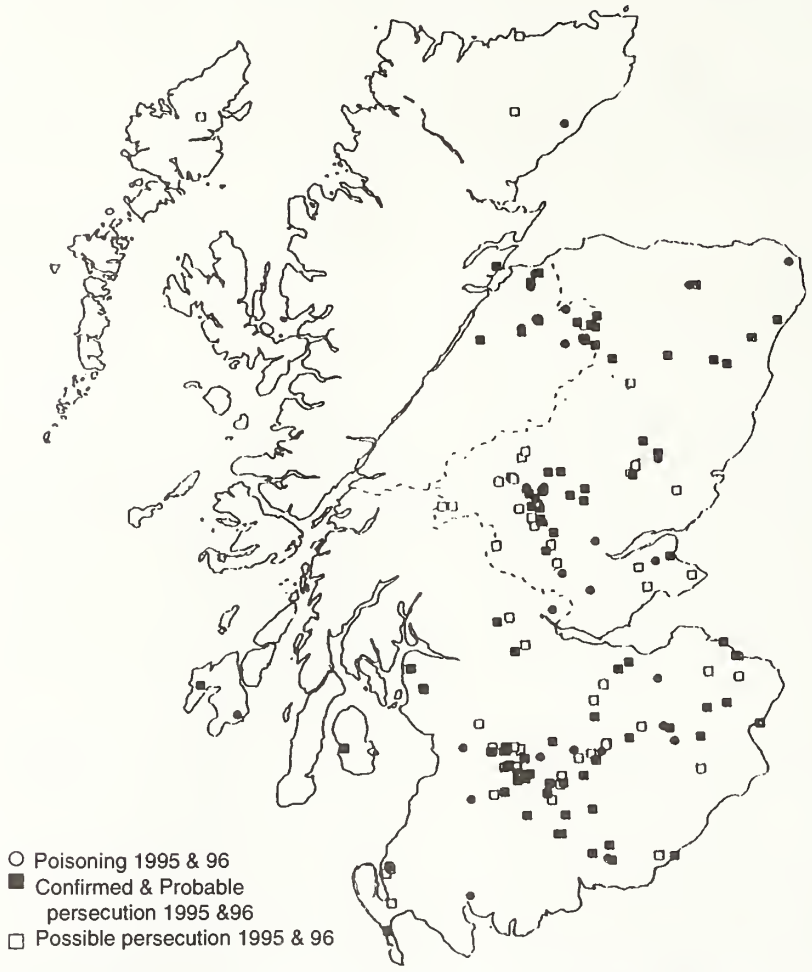
Some humour was added to a depressing picture when the Press & Journal reported that a Long-HAIRED Owl was among the victims!

Mike Everett

Buzzards continue to be the species most affected by poisoning. Happily their return to much of east Scotland continues despite the killing of significant numbers of individual birds. The increase in the illegal use of Carbofuran, a poison more toxic than Strychnine, poses threats not only to birds of prey but people. Despite several well publicised cases only one successful prosecution resulted in 1996 indicating that offenders are making greater efforts to conceal their activities.

The SOC endorses the RSPB's plea to report suspicious incidents to the police.

Poisoning and other raptor persecution 1995 and 1996 - the overall recent picture.



Copies of this report "A Review of Bird of Prey Persecution in Scotland in 1996" are available by writing to RSPB, Scottish Headquarters, 17 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BN

Hen Harrier *Arthur Gilpin*

SLF response to Langholm

This is an abridged version of a statement by the Convener of the Scottish Landowners' Federation (SLF) issued in early November.

We believe this is a ground breaking report. The facts it contains cannot be disputed. The SLF welcomes not just the report itself, but also the agreement which it has prompted from organisations which a few weeks ago were poles apart. This unified approach is the only way forward.

From our perspective we think it is vital that whatever can be done must be done to conserve the uplands, not just for grouse shooting, but because the roots of the uplands' prosperity lies in an integrated approach, in creating jobs, and in generating income. The Langholm solution is just one part of the mosaic to conserve the habitat which is being lost because, without grouse - and even with them - it often is simply not economically viable. One recent estimate indicates that, since the 1950s, Scotland's managed grouse moors have declined from around 500 to just 200. With that decline go full time and seasonal jobs, communites, and a rich range of biodiversity which only a managed moorland can deliver. The 12,000 acres at Langholm provide jobs for 5 keepers, and including other outlays cost some £96,000 per annum to sustain. But these jobs, grouse and harriers could all be potentially under threat from a change of land use.

There is no denying that the message that comes across loudest from the study is that when Hen Harriers - as well as other raptors - are offered absolute security and total protection from their main predators, Foxes and man, then their numbers increase, and they impact on grouse.

The SLF welcomes the agreement which has been struck between SNH, RSPB. The Game Conservancy and other bodies. We desperately wish to see an end to illegal persecution. We know it happens, we do not condone it - period.

Under the auspices of the Scottish Grouse Research Trust our upland members have now invested more that £1 million in associated research.

Reform of the EU's Common Agriculture Policy presents an opportunity for this whole issue to be thoroughly looked at. We should all work together in this context to promote a healthy upland environment.

It is time the uplands gained entitlement to some form of payment for active, non agricultural land management. SNH has also proposed this approach. We support this move for payment on a labour unit basis. Where there is a problem with overgrazing, it is because currently there is a securer future in sheep than in grouse. We want to see sheep numbers reduced to sustainable numbers, and we want more people on the hill to manage it for all species - not just grouse. This alone will go a long way to restoring the heather habitat. The solution to this problem, however, will not wait until reform of the CAP, and there is an anomaly. A Government agency, SNH, is now calling for subsidies for moorland; how comfortably does that sit with Government penalising landowners with the reintroduction of sporting rates?

Heather moorland is not a natural environment but one which has been created. Many owners manage their moors to the very best of their ability and to the limits of their available resources. They do not set out to degrade the land, they receive no public funding at present for what they do, thus the annual loss estimated at £10 million per annum. Grouse shooting has been described as the economic dynamo of the uplands, which as well as accounting for direct employment estimated at 580 full time equivalent jobs in 1994, also supports associated employment and community life on a scale which cannot be matched by forestry or agriculture on the same type of land. It brings part time employment, income for hotels and shops, business for supply trades. It promotes inward investment for the uplands as nothing else can. We are heartened that the RSPB's Chief Executive has offered to campaign with shooting interests to improve heather moorland including asking Government for subsidies for grouse as well as sheep and forest. Landowners should support the RSPB harrier count next year.

SNH and RSPB have spoken of a number of tests which would need to be applied before control of raptors would be considered is a solution necessary, is what is proposed practical, what would it cost, and is it socially acceptable? However, I have to ask, what does socially acceptable mean - acceptable to whom? Are we talking of a solution being acceptable to the public in general, and how is this to be determined? Is this provided it is socially acceptable to the RSPB membership? Is it deemed to be socially acceptable by a collective of politicians who may not have any knowledge of the countryside whatsoever? Or is it socially acceptable to those who actually depend upon the land? We need clarification of the ground rules for social acceptability, is it socially acceptable to put birds before families and jobs in remote areas, rural communites and upand viability in general?

Golden Eagle *Brian Turner*

At the Langholm launch everyone agreed to consider all possible options which might solve this conundrum. They should put an end to illegal persecution. And isn't it the solution that puts an end to illegal persecution of raptors that makes it socially acceptable?

Practical options are limited. There is enhanced heather moorland management; there is the option of alternative feeding of harriers' by offering them an available substitute so that less grouse are taken; there is the suggestion of a quota scheme which would not only increase numbers of grouse across the UK, but also double the number of Hen Harriers; and there is licensed control, a measure which has already been called for by the Scottish Gamekeepers' Association. Better moorland management is very much an issue of what each individual owner is prepared to do - but bear in mind that sheep and trees may still be better options, although a form of subsidy on a labour unit basis for the uplands may provide another. With alternative feeding - do we know if it will work? With increasing numbers of harriers are we not again into a spiral where the grouse chick remains very much on the menu? There may be merit in a quota approach - a scheme which increases the overall UK population of harriers, and, because it is quota based, should lead to an end to persecution, although the mechanics of such a scheme are still to be worked out.

Licensed control in our opinion is not currently an option.

Those party to this new agreement must also, irrespective of the size of the harrier population, and whilst including habitat management in the longer term solution, recognise the need for an immediate relief mechanism, if, as we all hope, illegal persecution is to stop. Lord Dalkeith says he is prepared to continue to put money into the management of Langholm until March, and many other Scottish moor owners are in the same predicament. They have scrupulously guarded their own grouse and their own raptors, and they have waited patiently for the studies results. They now want to see action.

Keepers across Scotland are fervently hoping for a solution that will remove any need to ever illegally persecute a harrier again, no matter the die hard traditions of the countryside. They are waiting for a postive sign. What they do not want are the extended deliberations of yet another talking shop. We have just 3 months to find the answer - because by February we are into yet another season.

Andrew Dingwall-Fordyce,
Convener, SLF

Goshawk *Arthur Gilpin*

Hen Harriers at Forsinard

Visitors to the RSPB Forsinard reserve in Sutherland can now watch Hen Harriers at their nest. In 1997 live pictures were relayed via a microwave transmitter to a screen in the visitor centre at Forsinard. In future years, live transmissions will begin earlier in the year in an effort to attract more visitors to the far north of Scotland during May and June. The RSPB and the Scottish Tourist Board have been working together over the last year to promote the development of a network of similar sites throughout Scotland. In the future it is hoped to bring participating centres together in the form of a 'Birds of Prey Trail'.

Fox research

One of the most controversial predator-prey relationships is that of Foxes and livestock. The issue has become linked to the issue of Fox hunting and hunters regularly claim that hunting is necessary to prevent unacceptable losses to foxes. A recent study by Bristol University does not support this argument.

Is the Fox a Pest: the Ecological and Economic Impact of Foxes in Britain, has been written by Stephen Harris, Robbie McDonald and Phil Baker. They conclude Foxes do kill farm animals but the overall numbers and importance compared to other losses are insignificant. The report says that only 5% of lamb deaths are caused by predation including dogs and Foxes. Of all viable lambs, as little as one in every 200 is taken by Foxes. It is estimated that the pig industry loses up to £7 million worth of stock to natural causes - of that, Fox kills account for around £150,000.

Foxes undoubtedly kill poorly protected hens. Kills by all predators, including Foxes, Brown Rats and birds of prey, represent a loss of at most £195,000 per year to the industry. All other losses amount to between £1.3 and £1.7 million.

Foxes do kill Rabbits. Rabbits according to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, cause £120 million of damage to agriculture every year. Rabbits are increasing and the Bristol team believes that figure will double. Rabbits account for more than half the annual food intake of Foxes in many parts of the country.

Balmoral estate

Given the high profile of its owner it is not surprising that anything to do with Balmoral attracts media interest. The 50,000 acre Balmoral estate covers an important part of the south east Cairngorms and includes one of Scotland's most famous hills, Lochnagar, which attracts 180,000 walkers and climbers every year. Earlier this year Balmoral was described as one of the worst run estates in Britain. Improvements in the way the estate is run are now being made with more emphasis on forest regeneration, removal of tracks which scar the hillsides and an increase in the numbers of deer shot.

The latest idea is to create 5 new blocks of native pine forest in Glen Gelder, north of Lochnagar. An application for £200,000 of Woodland Grant Scheme money has been made to the Forestry Authority and an environmental impact assessment will be carried out. The factor told newspapers "One reason we are doing it will be to have shelter for deer. The Prince of Wales is keen to see the expansion of the native forest, but he is also interested in developing the management of the deer on the estate".

More than 3,000 Red Deer live on Balmoral and the estate is aiming to reduce that figure to 2,500. This will still mean that fences will be needed to keep the deer from overgrazing the new woods.

Opinion on the scheme is divided. Some welcome any expansion of native woodland in the Highlands, but others are concerned that the fencing will kill Capercaillie and Black Grouse. Dr Adam Watson commented in the press "I have seen the results of a study done at Balmoral which showed that a large number of birds are being killed by fences they already have ... they don't need to maintain it as a sporting estate, they don't need the money, so deer numbers should be reduced".

Deer fence hazard

Reports that large numbers of grouse, including Capercaillie, are killed in collisions with deer fences in Scottish forests, have been confirmed by a new study by the RSPB and the Game Conservancy Trust, published in the *Journal of Applied Ecology*.

No fewer than 281 bird collisions were recorded in one year along 135km (84 miles) of deer fencing at 27 different sites in the Scottish Highlands. Red Grouse were involved in 188, Black Grouse in 37 and Capercaillie in 36. At least 16% of collisions were known to be fatal, but, as the carcasses are quickly removed by scavengers, the true figure is probably much higher.

Having declined over the last 20 years to only 2,200 birds, the Capercaillie is a species of high conservation concern. This new study and earlier ones show that deer fences are taking an unacceptably heavy toll. Where practicable, increased culling of Red Deer, particularly in the main native pinewood habitat of the Capercaillie, could lessen the need for fencing and thus greatly reduce the number of birds killed in collisions.

Black Grouse *Andrew Stevenson*

Charles Frank

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Ne'er day birds 1997

Last year to start the 60th anniversary year of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club a New Year bird count was organised. A total of 87 observers covered 83 tetrads in 1996 despite some poor weather and freezing temperatures. As repeat counts are needed to make the count data useful it was repeated in New Year 1997. Recording forms for the 1998 count are included with this issue of SBN.

House Sparrow *David Mitchell*

As in last year's count each counter chose a tetrad in their local area, made up of any 4 connecting 1km squares in their local area or, if they were on holiday, then they could choose an area near where they were staying. To complete the count the counter chose a route through the tetrad and counted, or estimated, the numbers of each species encountered. A counter's form was included with the December 1996 *SBN*. The count should have been completed during the New Year holidays and the idea behind it was to provide a second snapshot of Scotland's midwinter birds.

Table 1 summarises the returns from each recording area. The mean is the average of the total number of species seen in each tetrad.

Area	No of observers	No of tetrads covered	No of species			
			total	max	min	mean
Dumf & Gall	3	3	51	40	21	29
Borders	7	8	65	40	11	22
Ayr	6	6	81	55	28	38.8
Lothian	12	12	107	62	9	32
Clyde	5	5	78	60	11	28.6
Forth	3	1	37	37	37	37
Argyll	2	2	64	48	42	45
Fife	5	5	96	76	25	45.6
Perth & Kinross	5	7	75	39	19	28.8
Angus & Dundee	2	2	51	43	27	35
Northeast	9	10	69	43	6	22.6
Highland	10	9	94	45	8	30.2
Caithness	2	2	34	26	25	25.5
Islands	4	4	70	52	10	19.8
Total	75	76				

Although there were fewer counters than in 1996 they came from almost all areas of mainland Scotland from Wigtownshire to Caithness, except Moray & Nairn. In addition, there were single counters from Shetland and Orkney with 2 from the Western Isles. In all there were 75 counters who covered 76 tetrads and recorded a total of 147 species, the same number as in 1996.

Results

The weather was cold but not nearly as cold as 1996 and most areas of deeper freshwater did have some open areas in them where wildfowl could be found. There were also higher numbers of Snipe seen inland in 1997, reflecting the slightly less cold conditions. Although counts were mostly undertaken over the New Year holiday period some were done in the last few days of December or in the remainder of the first week in January. Most observers reported having rather fine, if cold, weather for their counts.

Table 2 the 10 most widespead species

	Species	No of tetrads	% of total
1	Blackbird	66	87%
2	Carrion/Hooded Crow	64	84%
3	Blue Tit	61	80%
4	Robin	58	76%
5	Chaffinch	57	75%
6	Woodpigeon	55	72%
7	Wren	53	70%
8	Great Tit	49	64%
9	Jackdaw	48	63%
10	Starling	47	62%

The % of the total tetrads in which these birds were found was lower in 1997 than in 1996.

Lothian was the area which recorded the highest number of species with 107 but here there were more counters than any other area and they covered a wide variety of habitats from moorland to rocky coast. Fife and Argyll each had around 45 species per tetrad. These areas had relatively few counters who concentrated on diverse low

lying, coastal areas. The highest species count in a tetrad was 76 species at St Fords Links, Shell Bay in Fife.

Again the highest diversity was found in the east and south where areas of predominantly mixed or arable farmland meet the sea. Other tetrads where there were a high number of species, such as Musselburgh in Lothian, had a mixture of habitats including freshwater, sea, scrub, grass and estuary. The lowest diversities were found in the north and west, especially in upland areas which are largely deserted in midwinter and where only Red Grouse, Ptarmigan and maybe Snow Bunting could be expected. Tetrads in urban areas also had a lower diversity than on farmland.

The most widespread species are set out in Table 2. As last year Blackbird and Carrion/Hooded Crow were the 2 most widespread species. Wren and Jackdaw moved into this 'top ten' but Dunnock and Rook have dropped out. Despite these changes the birds in the 'top ten' are similar to last year and again all, except Woodpigeon, are passerines and all are resident species.

Table 3 shows the 10 most numerous species seen in the 1997 count.

	Species	Total Nos	No of tetrads
1	Black-headed Gull	36	6268
2	Herring Gull	31	6119
3	Pink-footed Goose	8	3361
4	Rook	46	3253
5	Barnacle Goose	2	3150
6	Woodpigeon	55	2297
7	Chaffinch	57	2297
8	Mallard	44	2059
9	Oystercatcher	25	2040
10	Starling	47	1878

As in 1996 all of the most numerous species were flocking species and it is notable that 2 species of Goose are on Table 3. Unlike 1996 some large goose flocks were noted by observers, especially in Dumfries & Galloway and Perth & Kinross where flocks of Barnacle Geese and Pink-footed Geese were noted. The less icy conditions in New Year 1997 meant that more freshwater species were recorded and Mallard replaced the maritime Eider as the most numerous duck.

A number of species were recorded in very small numbers in only one or 2 tetrads. New species to the count included Ptarmigan (Highland), Iceland Gull (Fife), Pomarine Skua (Lothian), Canada Goose (Lothian), Long-eared Owl (Orkney) and Chiffchaff (Orkney). Species seen last year but not in 1997 included Black-necked Grebe, Marsh Tit, Chough and Scottish Crossbill.

Winter visitors

The winter of 1996-97 was noted for an irruption of Waxwings. It appears that the largest Waxwing flocks did, however, not coincide with tetrads chosen by New Year bird counters. Similarly, the influx of Redpolls in 1995-96 was largely missed by counters in 1996 and, indeed, Redpolls were more numerous in the 1997 count.

Raptors

The 3 common raptor species were relatively widespread.

The Buzzard has increased in Scotland in recent years and is now a common sight in many parts of the country where it was formerly very rare. Between the 2 counts there has been a slight increase in the numbers of tetrads, from 28 to 33 and a far higher proportion of the tetrads counted were occupied by Buzzards.

A surprise was the apparent decrease in Sparrowhawks from 29 birds in 26 tetrads down to 14 birds in 13 tetrads while Kestrels increased from 41 birds in 29 tetrads to 45 birds in 35 tetrads. This may be due to the weather. Kestrels prey largely on rodents and the covering of snow in 1996 may have forced many Kestrels to temporarily abondon winter hunting ranges. Similarly, the weather in 1996 may have forced the small birds preyed on by Sparrowhawks into more open areas where the hawks were easier to observe.

1998

The count is being repeated in 1998. A form is enclosed with this edition of *SBN*. At the time of writing (early October) there's been an Indian summer and many of the winter visitors have still to arrive. We have already seen good numbers of Siskins, Redpolls and Crossbills this autumn and this could be refelected in the counts.

The more people who take part in these counts and the more tetrads and habitats covered then the more accurately the counts will reflect the populations of our winter birds and the more useful they will be. Please take part this year, it's better than nursing a hangover!

David Kelly

Table 4 compares the numbers of species which are mainly winter visitors between 1996 and 1997.

	Species	No of tetrads 1996	Numbers	No of tetrads 1997	Numbers
1	Purple Sandpiper	8	95	7	70
2	Turnstone	20	757	14	240
3	Rock Pipit	17	123	17	76
4	Fieldfare	52	1365	30	782
5	Redwing	44	518	31	426
6	Waxwing	2	7	4	153
7	Brambling	9	59	7	93
8	Redpoll	10	60	11	163
9	Snow Bunting	2	2	4	39

Long-tailed Tit *Andy Dowell*

National parks on the horizon

The announcement by the Scottish Secretary that Loch Lomond and the Trossachs will become a national park marks a sea change in Government attitudes, although implementation will have to await the new Scottish Parliament. The decision follows years of Scottish Office resistance. The idea of creating national parks in Britain was first mooted in 1929 when the Addision Committee recommended separate park authorities for Scotland and for England and Wales.

The 1944 Scottish National Parks Survey Committee recommended 5 parks be set up at Loch Lomond and the Trossachs; Glen Affric, Glen Cannich and Strath Farrar; Ben Nevis, Glen Coe and Black Mount; the Cairngorms; and Loch Torridon, Loch Maree and Little Loch Broom. An enquiry in 1946 proposed spending £1.3 million to take land in proposed park areas into public ownership. Although the report concluded that national parks would benefit local economies, there was wide opposition Private landowners objected to public ownership; the Scottish Office feared restrictions on hydro-electric development and residents in remote, less scenic areas outwith the designated park areas felt they would miss out on financial assistance.

While Scotland's plans were put on ice, less radical proposals for England and Wales were given the go ahead. Eleven national parks were designated between 1951 and 1957. Land ownership remained private, planning boards were established to oversee new developments, with one third of the membership made up by government representatives to represent conservation and recreation.

In 1974 the Countryside Commission for Scotland proposed parks in the Cairngorms, Loch Lomond and Ben Nevis/ Glencoe. Special park authorities were to run them, but again the idea foundered following opposition from conservation bodies who objected to local government representatives being in the majority. In 1980 the CCS set up 40 National Scenic Areas to protect the countryside. This allowed the CCS to be consulted over certain types of development within the designated areas and required the Scottish Secretary to be called in if disputes could not be resolved.

The United Nations put on pressure in the early 1980s when it included Scotland on a list of nations it said should establish a national park as a priority. The then Scottish environment minister, Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, invited the CCS to look at Scotland's popular mountain areas, including consideration of national parks. CCS did come out in favour of national parks, but, in 1991, the Scottish Secretary, Ian Lang, vetoed the idea, saying the voluntary principle of landowners and local authorities agreeing to take appropriate action was sufficient. With opinion polls showing 90% support for national parks, a new consensus emerged among conservation groups, including the SOC through its its membership of Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Link, about the need for an umbrella authority which could bring together planning, conservation and development responsibilities.

Treecreeper *BCF*

TV boss for Cairngorms

Gus Macdonald, chairman of the Scottish Media Group, has been appointed as the next chairman of the Cairngorms Partnership. The body, formed 2 years ago to secure the future of Britain's most important mountain area, will come under the leadership of a man known more for Scottish Television than Highland land issues. Mr Macdonald, who takes over from David Laird, was quoted as saying "I believe a fresh perspective is needed to fulfil the vital role the partnership will have in the coming years". That role, says Scottish environment minister Lord Sewel, is likely to be an interim one with the formation of a Cairngorms National Park. Mr Macdonald faces a more immediate test - resolving the Cairngorm funicular issue.

Damage to wildlife sites

Almost one in five of Britain's most important wildlife sites have been damaged by farmers and developers over the last 5 year. Even more destruction may be going unreported because local people do not know they have a designated wildlife site on their doorstep.

Friends of the Earth has launched what it calls a neighbourhood watch scheme for Sites of Special Scientific Interest - a new website on the Internet called Wild Places!, which details every designated area in the country and invites the public to report damage.

According to figures FoE obtained from Government agencies, including Scottish Natural Heritage, more that 300 SSSIs are damaged every year.

Wild Places! includes an interactive map to enable web site users to find their local SSSIs. The Internet number is WWW.FOE.Co.UK/WILD PLACES.

Controversy round Strathbeg

Farmers in the north east of Scotland have accused Scottish Natural Heritage of forcing them to start shooting geese again around one of Scotland's largest nature reserves after the conservation body refused to maintain a £20,000 protection scheme around the Loch of Strathbeg.

Under the goose protection scheme funded by SNH, farmers did not shoot Pink-footed Geese for the last 3 years. The compensation deal turned many fields into sanctuaries, providing the geese with food and the farmers with cash incentives.

The local representative of the National Farmers Union's goose committee said farmers were disappointed by the ending of the deal. "The scheme only cost £20,000 a year to run. Yet SNH are continuing to pay £400,000 a year to farmers on Islay where there is a similar scheme for Greenland White-fronted Geese which have full protection. We would have liked to have seen SNH carry the scheme on because everyone agreed it was a success. Of all the goose compensation schemes in the UK, the Loch of Strathbeg scheme was one of the most economic, if not the cheapest".

A spokesman for SNH said "The scheme demonstrated an efficient method of influencing the distribution of Pink-footed Geese on farmland. We hope that the results of the demonstration project will inform the recently formed National Goose Forum in tackling long term management of geese in the area". However, it is likely to be 2 years before the Forum produces an action plan.

Police wildlife liaison work

Golden Eagle *Mike Ashley*

Police Wildlife Liaison Officers are a fairly recent development. It is not that police officers have become suddenly responsible for the policing of crimes against wildlife - they have had this responsibility for many years - but they are now proactive in their approach to these investigations instead of reacting to investigations already under way or even completed by organisations such as RSPB and SSPCA.

Wildlife crime is a fairly specialised field, and, although countries such as America and Norway have dedicated or specialised agencies, such as the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Okorim, developments in UK have not followed such a course and wildlife crime is a matter for the police.

In 1979 Essex Constabulary initiated a wildlife liaison scheme. This simply was that a designated officer acted in a liaison and co-ordination role between the public, conservation groups, relevant agencies or statutory bodies, and other police officers. This lead was followed by other English forces and, by the end of the 1980s, most English forces and a few Scottish ones had a PWLO. In the 1990s the scheme was consolidated, and now all forces in Britain have at least one PWLO in a part time role in addition to normal duties, while many have several part time PWLOs. Several forces now have a full time officer.

In Tayside Police, there are now 13 PWLOs distributed throughout the force area who carry out PWLOs duties in addition to their other day to day work, and a civilian Wildlife Liaison Co-ordinator, in an administrative and co-ordination role. In common with some other forces, the remit has been slightly expanded to embrace wildlife and environmental crime, education, which includes that of other police officers, school children and students, and those involved with game management.

It is important to bear in mind that many crimes occur in remote places seldom visited by people, and go largely undetected. If there has been a high incidence of poisoning or illegal shooting incidents in Tayside, then this is likely to have been the tip of the iceberg. The recovery of the evidence or initial investigation presents special difficulties for police officers since the nature of the terrain often means that a long walk is inevitable, and the best part of a day may be required to recover a bait, an illegal trap or a victim. Scenes of crime examinations are invariably carried out by the PWLO attending, since it would generally be impracticable for a scenes of crime officer to attend. This adds another specialisation to those already required by a PWLO, since some form of evidence at the scene may be the only link with the individual responsible. The taking of rare birds' eggs or Badger digging are crimes which may involve similar problems by way of difficulty of access, and they too would require a scenes of crime examination to be carried out.

The public often ask what action they should take if they suspect a crime has taken place. The general guidelines would be to:

* Preserve the scene as much as possible, which mainly means not destroying evidence such as footprints by trampling, and not handling anything which may bear traces of fingerprint impressions, such as tins or plastic;
* Photograph the scene, trap, bait or victim if possible, and protect any further potential victims by covering up traps or anything which may contain poison;
* Do not handle anything which is suspected of containing poison;
* Report the find to a Police Wildlife Liaison Officer as soon as possible, giving an accurate description of the location, including a map reference.

It is important to realise that many traps and snares found in the countryside are set legally, and, whether or not you agree with the principle, these should not be interfered with.

PWLOs have the responsibility, often in conjunction HM Customs, of investigating the illegal importing or exporting of animals, plants and their derivatives. Wildlife smuggling is rife throughout the world and deserves more attention from law enforcement agencies in Britain than it currently receives. One might normally associate wildlife smuggling in Britain as an "import' rather than "export" situation . Britain, however, holds many rare species of animals and birds, and while no doubt many live specimens are smuggled out, many more leave our shores as dead specimens for taxidermy. Scotland in particular attracts large numbers of foreign field sportsmen and, while the majority are law abiding, one or 2 are already suspected of this type of crime.

Tayside PWLOs maintain close links with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, whose remit includes river pollution and fly tipping of rubbish.

While poaching is less common that it was 20 or 30 years ago, there still exist 2 main problem areas, which Tayside PWLOs are helping to address. The first is to the poaching of deer, mainly Red Deer. With venison prices increasing some poachers now look on taking deer illegally as a commercial enterprise, and in Northern Tayside, PWLOs have assisted in setting up local "poacher watches".

The other local problem relates to gangs of people coursing Brown Hares with Lurcher dogs, often in the early hours of a Sunday morning. These people's interest is not catching hares for the pot or for sale, but simply to train and test their dogs. The hare, once caught and killed is left lying. A recent case was reported to the Procurator Fiscal under the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996, which has a higher

level of fine and also the option of imprisonment available to the court, rather than the somewhat outdated poaching legislation.

Education is coming to the forefront of the Tayside PWLOs agendas. This incorporates the involvement of schools in environmental projects, often along with estates involved in game management. This also has an important spin off in the education of estate staff, who, until recently, often only considered estate or shooting interests and not those of environment, habitat, members of the public, or even that they may be committing a crime. Tayside Police recently won a Scottish Environmental Award for an education initiative on Hen Harriers.

Tayside PWLOs have a good relationship with shooting interests, such as the British Association of Shooting and Conservation, the Game Conservancy and the newly formed Scottish Gamekeepers' Association. It is now certain that Tayside PWLO's will be involved in the future training of young keepers.

In future, Tayside PWLOs will host a regular meeting of organisations involved in wildlife, environmental or countryside issues with a view to forming a local partnership.

There are still many issues to be resolved, often between conflicting interests, but some of these processes have now been started. PWLOs clearly have the support of the vast majority of town and country people, which is particularly satisfying since it is to the public that the police are accountable.

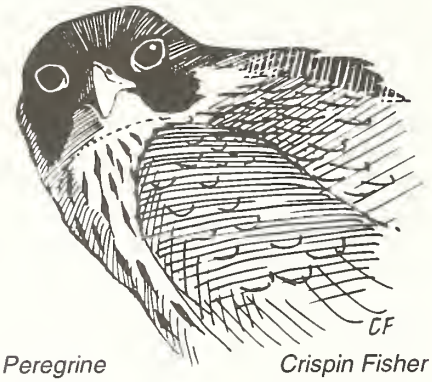
Tayside Police's statement of intent in relation to the issues reads:

Tayside Police are committed to work with all agencies across the wide range of wildlife, environment and countryside interests. We aim to develop effective partnerships, promote preventive strategies and encourage educational initiatives which improve the understanding of wildlife issues. We have a statutory duty to enforce the law on wildlife and environmental crime.

Alan Stewart
Wildlife Liaison Co-ordinator,
Tayside Police

Tayside Police have recently launched a confidential Wildlife Crime Hotline. Any suspicious incidents should be reported immediately. Tel 01382 205500

Fine for egg thieves cut on appeal



Peregrine *Crispin Fisher*

Four appeal judges have expressed frustration that jail sentences cannot be imposed under wildlife law as they cut record £90,000 fines on 2 egg thieves. At the Justiciary Appeal Court, Lord Sutherland, sitting with Lord Cullen, the Lord Justice Clerk, and Lord Allanbridge, pointed out jail terms could not be imposed under the Wildlife and Countryside Act. Lord Sutherland said: "Someone with limited means who breaches the statute can do so with a considerable degree of impunity. It is a most unsatisfactory sate of affairs".

Both MacLaren, 34, of Montague Road and McLaren, 35, of Braintree Road (brothers from Portsmouth but who spell their names differently), had each been fined £90,000 by Sheriff Wright at Kirkwall Sheriff Court in May on 70 charges under the act. The offences included taking and possessing eggs and disturbing rare and protected birds on the Birsay Moors reserve on Orkney.

MacLaren earned £130 a week as a labourer and his brother earned £53 a week as a part time taxi driver. The brothers had not taken the eggs on a commercial basis and had not benefited financially from the offences they had committed.

The sheriff had calculated the maximum fine was £294,000. He had based the penalties he imposed on a percentage of the maximum fine per egg. However, the calculation did not take into account the means of the accused, something the court was obliged to do. The judges restricted the penalties to £6,000 and £4,000.

Keith Morton, an RSPB investigations officers said "I have spoken to many egg collectors and, while they all feel compelled to do it, a lot of them have said it would just not be worth it if there was a possibility they could go to jail".

Murder on Callum's Hill

On glancing out of the window on 13 September 1997 we became aware that the cows in the field to the rear of the house house near Crieff were behaving in an unusual manner. They were running and grouping around some object on the grass which turned out to be a Buzzard. The bird could run for a short distance, flapping its wings, but was unable to take off. The cows chased the Buzzard relentlessly, sometimes butting it with their noses, but mostly just surrounding it and chasing when the bird managed to get away.

The cows soon became more aggressive, managing to toss the bird, kicking, stamping and making deep 'growling' noises unlike their normal lowing. They ignored a man who went into the field, shouted and clapped his hands. The cows, still 'growling', stood round the dead bird for some time, and although it was lifeless one or other of the cattle took turns to toss or kick the carcass. They eventually quietened down and wandered away.

A neighbour took the Buzzard to the police wildlife liaison officer to see if he could explain why the bird could not fly. The cows had young with them but the calves were well grown.

Elspeth Macfarlane

My kitchen window looks out on Callum's Hill, but I did not see the incident. Some days previously I had seen 3 Buzzards circling and mewing above Callum's Hill, possibly a young bird and its parents. Some days later I saw a single Buzzard, presumably a young bird judging by its flight, being harried by Crows and other birds. If this was the bird seen by Mrs Macfarlane it is not clear what injury left the Buzzard unable to fly. One explanation is a collision, while attempting to evade the Crows, with an overhead electric power line which comes across the field.

The police officer who visited the site following Mrs Macfarlane's report confirmed that the dead Buzzard was not fully grown. There was no sign of shot wounds, suggesting that the Buzzard's death had resulted from a collision.

Bill Gauld

We are grateful to Stan Shimeld for passing on this information. Cattle will often cluster round intruders such as dogs, or even people, who can normally either chase them off or walk away.

Aggressive behaviour of Green Sandpiper on migration

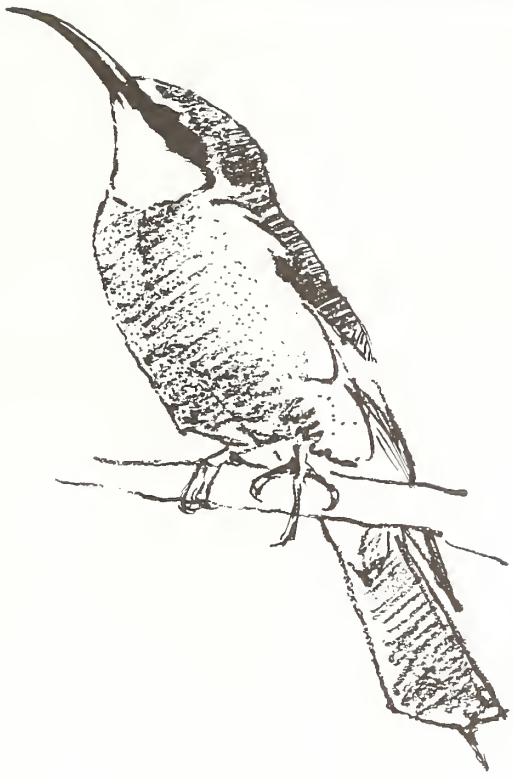
In August 1997 in east Scotland I was in a hide installed by a ditch to photograph a Green Sandpiper.

During the 5 hours I spent in the hide at least 3 Green Sandpipers visited the ditch, possibly a fourth and also a Greenshank. As I watched I noticed that 2 of the Green Sandpipers stayed fairly close together. I wondered whether they might be an adult and it's offspring. Over a period of perhaps half an hour their behaviour changed. One bird would chase the other in what seemed like a game of leap frog. As neither bird had any distinguishing features I could not be certain that only one of the birds was the instigator.

This phase continued for some time. I could not take any photos as both birds were, by this time, trotting about so fast that they could barely feed. One flew at the other at least twice, resulting in a mid air tussle. In the next phase one bird sat down, apparently to divert the aggression of the other, once in the water looking uncomfortable and the other occasion on a small patch of mud in front of the hide. They eventually parted. Why the bird on the receiving end did not fly away, even to the other end of the ditch which was about 100 metres long is a mystery.

Another curious fact about the Green Sandpipers I noted was that, when feeding near to the hide, they would periodically pause, walk a yard or so into the edge of the reeds and defecate; it was as though they did not wish to soil the water that they were feeding in.

Eric McCabe



Bee-eater *John Busby*

Grampian branch trip to Mallorca

Eight members of the SOC Grampian branch visited Mallorca from 2-9 May, 1997. Like most birders, we based ourselves in the Pollensa region at Cala San Vincente. We hired 2 cars and, in a week's stay, had no trouble in covering all the major places and habitats, with a spare day at the end. Even around the hotel we picked up a variety of good birds including Eleonora's Falcon, with Scops Owl calling in the evenings and seen by a lucky few. Audouin's Gulls lounge on the beach at Puerto Pollensa.

Our first main objective was S'Albufera Parc, just south of Alcudia. Here there are reedbeds, open water, as well as bushes on the raised patches and some disused saltpans. Avian highlights included Night Heron, Woodchat Shrike, Eleonora's Falcon and Moustached Warbler. The abundant Cetti's and Fan-tailed Warblers soon ceased to be highlights! There is a small group of introduced White-headed Ducks and Purple Gallinules, and we also picked up Garganey and Marbled Teal. A scrape attracts Black-winged Stilts to breed. Behind the reserve, a drier scrubby area held Hoopoe, Bee-eater and Short-toed Lark. Here there is a water treatment plant at which we found the highlight of week for me - Collared Pratincole.

The Albufereta is a smaller area of drier marsh. Memorable birds here were Marsh Harrier, Osprey, Eleonora's Falcon and a stray young female Red-footed Falcon.

The northernmost part of the island is the Formentor Peninsula, a wild and rocky promontory ending in a lighthouse, which means that there is good road along it. Eleonora's Falcons circle the lighthouse, and a short seawatch gave Cory's and Mediterranean Shearwaters. Blue Rock Thrushes and Crag Martins were also in evidence. Further down the peninsula we stopped at the viewpoint known as the Albercutx Mirador and were able to look down on Pallid Swifts and one of the island's specialities, Marmora's Warbler. The migrant traps of Casas Veyas and the Bocquer Valley were quiet in the calm, settled weather but yielded nesting pairs of Cirl Buntings, Egyptian Vultures and a Booted Eagle. Winding mountain roads lead from Pollensa village to the monastery of Lluc and, beyond this, Cuber Reservoir. By walking round the reservoir we saw Spectacled and Subalpine Warblers, Tawny Pipit, Black Vultures and Eurasian Rock Thrush. There was also a much disputed second vulture which may have been the island's lone Griffon.

We had one major trip to an area of saltpans known as the Salines de Levante which produced Water Rail, White-winged Black Terns and a variety of waders. Not far away is the Cap Salinas peninsula, on which Stone Curlew and Thekla Lark can be located. Audouin's Gulls also occur in this part of the island, but these days they are easier to see in Puerto Pollensa. This was the only day on which I did not see Eleonora's Falcon. This very elegant aerobat is definitely one of the highlights of the island, provided one comes early in May. Most of the other species mentioned, and a variety of migrants, can be seen in April but the Eleonora's, along with Bee-eaters and Stone Curlews, are among the later birds to return.

Altogether we saw 123 species. Flying direct from Aberdeen, staying in cheap accommodation and the hiring of 2 comfortable cars, cost less than £300 per head (excluding the beer!)

Susan Armstrong

REVIEWS

Rare and scarce birds in north east Scotland *by I M Phillips. Published privately by the author, 1977. £20 ISBN O 9531259 0 4.*

The title may suggest a narrow scope, but this is misleading. NE Scotland is taken as the former Banff and Buchan, Gordon, Aberdeen and Kincardine and Deeside districts, but the 159 species include many which are more common elsewhere in Scotland. Species accounts vary from a few lines to 2 pages. Many include annual totals since 1960, cumulative monthly totals (all years), or a complete list of historical and recent records, and maps. Other sections provide a birder's calendar giving rarer species present on each day of the year, bibliography, gazetteer with grid references of all sites, checklist with BOU category for all 340 species recorded in the north east, plus species indexes. The attractive illustrations include colour photographs and numerous line drawings.

Production is to a high standard, and the book is an excellent example of its kind. Any reader in the north east Scotland will want to have a copy, as will many outside that region.

John Law

The EBCC Atlas of European Breeding Birds their distribution and abundance. *Edited by Ward J M Hagemeijer, Michael J Blair. Published for the European Bird Census Council by T & A D Poyser. 1997. £55 903pp. ISBN 0-85661-091-7*

Europe here includes the Azores, Iceland, and other islands east of Novaya Zemlya, as well as Mediterranean islands (but not Cyprus). Over 500 species in all are covered, mostly with a 2 page spread giving distribution, numbers in specific countries and population and range trends. The 8 page introduction is in English repeated in 13 other languages. Species accounts are in English, with names in 13 other languages. Maps show dots in 50km squares, in various sizes and colours; this data is either qualitative (breeding confirmed or probable/possible/absent) or semi quantitative (6 dot sizes for numbers increasing by factors of 10). Sadly, data is lacking for a few squares in Spain and Italy, more in the Balkans, and for almost all of the former USSR. These no data squares are shown in all maps. This is probably the greatest weakness of the book, compensated for in the USSR by breeding ranges taken from BWP being shown. Other data are shown in concise but clear and effective ways, some of them new to this reader at least, though careful reading is always needed or you will be confused or worse still, misled.

This is a monumental work, based on enormous effort and international cooperation. Anyone professionally involved in the subject will refer to it frequently. Amateurs who travel on the continent, or with more than a passing interest in UK population trends, will find it absorbing, eg to compare alarming UK declines with the complete continental picture. The price is modest for a book of this scale.

Of course there are minor weaknesses in a work of this scope, but they are small compared to its strengths. No individual could vouch for its overall accuracy. Some UK data in it may raise eyebrows, though that may not mean it is wrong. Inevitably one wonders about a winter companion, but for the moment the authors have fully earned a time of rest.

John Law

Birds of Lochaber *by Dominic Sargent. Published privately by the author. 1997. 36pp ISBN 9-9530346-07*

An excellent little publication for anybody wishing to visit the Lochaber area. It describes the district of Lochaber, the birdwatching year and the various habitats and their birds. Good places to visit are given with map references. A list of migration dates unusual bird records and status are included at the end of the book.

Sylvia Laing

The Birds of St Lucia *BOU Checklist No 15. 1997 176pp £12.00 UK £14.00 overseas incs. post & packing. Available from the BOU, c/o The Natural History Museum, Tring, Herts HP23 6AP. ISBN 0-907446-19-1*

Another successful checklist giving details of the avifauna of an oceanic island. Introductory chapters cover the geology, geography, climate and vegetation. Other chapters include migration, conservation and zoogeography of the island's breeding birds. A comprehensive reference list and systematic list give details accounts of every species reliably recorded in the archipelago.

Sylvia Laing

Library request

We would like to remind members that the Library is always interested in receiving donations of ornithological books with the proviso that these may be sold on to aid the funds if copies are already on the shelves. Journals are also appreciated especialy if in sequence.

Waterston Library news

We continue to receive donations of books and journals from members for which we are extremely grateful. Recent donors include Niall Rankin, Prof. Norman Grist, Dr Ian Pennie and the late Billy Murray's estate.

Amongst the many additions to the collection is a presentation large paper copy of Turnbull's 'Birds of East Lothian', very generously given to us by Mrs Fides Schofield of Inverness who is a direct descendant of the author.

David Clugston

Heron *David Mitchell*

Other books received

The Birdwatcher's Yearbook & Diary 1998 *Edited by John E Pemberton. Buckingham Press 320pp 1997 £12.50 ISBN 0144-364X*

When Owls do cry *The Story of the Barn Owl a film by Ivor Leonard. 1997. 28 minutes approx. £12.99 ISBN 5-032711-092694*

SOC Ayrshire branch trip to Germany and Austria

Following their successful trip to Cyprus in April 1997 (see SBN 47) the Ayrshire Branch are planning to visit Germany and Austria from 1-11 May, 1998 and would welcome people from any of the other SOC branches. The leaders will be Jim Thomson and Tony Scott and the cost is about £450. The tour is a door to door coach excursion, with half board accommodation in mainly 3 star hotels. The holiday is designed to allow visits to a variety of habitats, from the low level flood plains, wet meadows and woodlands of the Rhine backwaters near Worms and Speyer, to the beautiful landscape of lake and mountains on Germany's largest freshwater lake, the Bodensee. The tour promises diversity of landscape, flora and fauna and many wonderful historic sights - despite school day jokes about the Diet of Worms the food and wine of the region is always a delight with a variety and quality unsurpassed.

A more detailed itinerary (send an sae) is available from **Tony Scott, 4 Hilltop Place, Ayr KA7 3PB Tel 01292 281085** or **Jim Thomson** on **01292 570351.**

Trust office moves to Scotland

The A Rocha Trust, an international organisation of Christians in conservation now has its UK office in south west Scotland. The Trust is well known for its field study centre in Portugal, where Dr Mark Bolton and his wife Jane are the wardens. Mark, who studied ornithology at Glasgow University, spent 3 summers working on Storm Petrels on Mousa before moving to the Algarve. It was good training, as the A Rocha team tape lue Stormies from a coastal headland in June each year. Other activities at the small, community include the ringing of waders and passerines, varied ecological research projects, hospitality for visitors from all corners of the world and field studies with local school children.

Mark and Jane will be in Scotland in January, talking about A Rocha's work in Portugal, Lebanan, France and the UK. For information about their programme, or the wider work of the Trust contact **Barbara Mearns, A Rocha Trust, Connansknowe, Kirkton, Dumfries DG1 1SX Tel/Fax 01387 710286 or email a_rocha@compuserve.com. Or visit our new web site at http;//www.arocha.org.**

Pure white gull

In late June a Herring Gull chick with pure white plumage was ringed at a colony in Loch Sunart. Its eyes, bill and legs were normal. It was flying well while still at the colony in late July. It is conspicuously different from the brown-grey juveniles and from the familiar grey-winged adults. The metal BTO ring is on its left leg.

This leucistic condition is rare (about one in a million Herring Gulls?). This individual may appear anywhere in south or west Scotland in the near future, but it is most likely to occur within 100 km of its natal site - so please keep a special eye open in the Mallaig, Fort William and Oban areas. I would be very grateful for dates and places of any sightings, together with any information. **Clive Craik, Marine Laboratory, P O Box 3, Oban, Argyll PA34 4AD. Tel (evening) 01631 720327. Fax. 01631 565518.**

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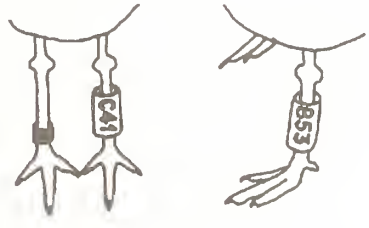
http://www/kiwi-wildlife.co.nz
or write c/- 24 Polkinghorne Drive, Manly, Whangaparaoa, North Auckland, New Zealand.

REQUESTS

Darvic ringed Oystercatchers

Aberdeen is notable for a large population of Oystercatchers nesting on flat roofs in the city. This roof nesting habit was first noted in the early 1970s when there were about 30 breeding pairs. This has increased to about 250 pairs. Six adults and over 100 chicks were ringed in 1997 with a yellow or white darvic ring on the left leg bearing a unique combination of a letter and 2 digits (see diagram). Although primarily aimed at determining the site faithfulness of roof reared birds returning to breed, we are also keen to gather information on post fledging dispersal. Ringing indicates that Oystercatchers from north east Scotland move mainly south and west in winter towards Morecambe Bay and into Ireland while others spend the winter on estuaries along the east and south coasts of Britain. The rings are fairly unobtrusive and will probably require a telescope to read so any sightings will be gratefully welcome and acknowledged (promptly!) with a full history. Please contact either **Alistair Duncan, 12 Cairncry Avenue, Aberdeen AB16 5DS** or **Raymond Duncan, 86 Broadford Drive, Bridge of Don, Aberdeen AB23 8PP.**



Colour ringed Shags

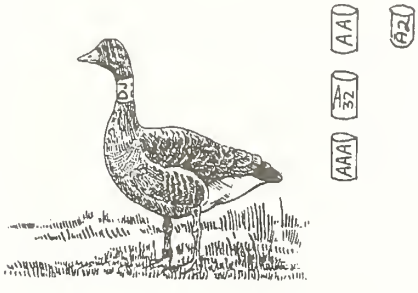
For many years Shags breeding on the Isle of May in the Firth of Forth have been colour ringed with yellow rings engraved with 2 letters. In 1997 as many as possible of the young were marked with white rings engraved with 3 letters. In addition, adults of known age are marked with similar red rings. This is a joint project between the Isle of May Bird Observatory, the University of Glasgow and ITE. Although adult Shags usually winter within 150 km of the colony, juveniles disperse. We would welcome sightings of any colour ringed Shag and will supply details of the individuals involved. Please report to: **Mike Harris, Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, Hill of Brathens, Banchory, Kincardineshire, AB31 4BY. Phone 01330-823434 Fax 01330-823303 Email m.p.harris@ite.ac.uk.**

Census of native Scottish Greylag Geese

A complete census of native Scottish Greylag Geese is currently underway. Organised counts have been undertaken during August/September 1997 primarily on Coll and Tiree, the Outer Hebrides and Sutherland and Caithness. However, Greylag Geese also appear in small numbers in other areas of north and west Scotland. I would welcome any details of sightings of Greylag Geese from any areas to the west of the Great Glen from **August or September** before the Icelandic wintering birds arrived. Please note date, location, flock size, habitat type, crop (if known) and please make a note of any coloured leg rings or collars seen and forward to: **Carl Mitchell, WWT, Slimbridge, Gloucester. GL2 7BT**
Thank you in advance.

Colour marked Greylag Geese

Sightings of Greylags bearing dye marks, darvic rings or neck collars, together with details of colours and letters seen, no matter how incomplete, should be sent to: **Bob Swann, 14 St Vincent Road, Tain, Ross-shire IV19 1JR (01862 894329)**



This is DJ - collars should be read from the bottom up.

SOC NOTICES

Subscriptions

It appears that some members have not renewed their subscriptions and a further reminder is enclosed. Also we have noticed that quite a number of banks have not followed the instructions on the Bankers' Order to cancel all previous orders on behalf of the SOC. While we are doing everything in our power to rectify this perhaps you could check your bank statements and let us know of any errors.

Ian Darling, President

The 1998 Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference

The Fife Branch are organising the 1998 Conference to be held on Saturday 14th March, 1998 at St Andrew's University. The theme is 'Birds and their Habitats in Eastern Scotland' with talks ranging from habitat creation, ringing, recording and waterfowl distribution to Pink-feet (site fidelity and social structure), Willow Warblers, the work of the Tay Ringing Group and the top sites in eastern Scotland for recording rarities. **There will also be local SOC led outings on the morning of Sunday 15th March. The full programme is enclosed with this mailing.**

200 Club

Winners in the third quarter of 1997 were:
July - 1st £30 Mr & Mrs Burn, East Kilbride; 2nd £20 T Dobson, Galashiels; 3rd £10 A Bryson, Edinburgh.
August - 1st £30 A Bastable, Monifieth; 2nd £20 R Smith, Plymouth; 3rd £10 A Tewnion, Dollar.
September - 1st £30 Mrs S Denney, Glasgow; 2nd £20 A Smith, Bo'ness; 3rd £10 N Henderson, Edinburgh.

For details of how any SOC member over 18 can join the 200 Club, please contact me **Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL. (Tel. 01896 822176).**

The breeding birds of south east Scotland

Work is well advanced on this tetrad atlas of breeding birds which will be published by the Club. This major work covers all 1756 tetrads in the Lothians and Borders. Field work took place during the period 1988-94. Over 250 volunteers collected some 91,000 records of 168 species. Each species will have a double page spread giving a detailed account, the distribution map, maps comparing the 1968-72 and present distributions and graphs such as altitude and various habitat features.

The atlas will be published next March with a launch at the Club's Spring Conference. A pre publication offer available to members is detailed in a leaflet enclosed with this issue of *SBN*. All those interested in the birds of south-east Scotland should take up this offer. If you have any enquiries about the atlas please contact **Ray Murray (01721 7306770)**, or about the offer **Jim Mattocks (0131 332 7104).**

Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club. It is published 4 times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices need to be sent to the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace no later than 5 weeks before publication. The magazine acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and to disseminate information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. The views expressed in articles in *Scottish Bird News* are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication. The SOC also publishes the journal *Scottish Birds* which publishes original papers and notes on Scottish ornithology and the *Scottish Bird Report*. For details of these publications and membership contact the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

Discussion Group 1998

The south east Scotland Discussion Group meets monthly in the Library at 21 Regent Terrace to talk about fieldwork, surveys and local conservation issues and eat cake! All SOC members are welcome to attend. Meetings start at 1930hrs and are normally on the first Wednesday of the month apart from the summer months. The dates for 1998 are: 7 January, 4 February, 4 March, 1 April, 2 September, 7 October, 4 November and 2 December. We look forward to seeing many new faces this year.

Photographic competition

Nine members entered this year's Photographic competition. The standard of entry was extremely high and gave the judges a major headache trying to pick the winners. The winning entries were finally decided upon as:
3rd - King Eider in a group of Common Eiders, by Sam Alexander; 2nd - Greylag Goose by Edmund Fellowes; 1st - Common Snipe by Eric McCabe.

Thanks to

Once again, many thanks are due to the willing volunteers who came in to Regent Terrace in August to do the mammoth stuffing of the last mailing. They were: Chris and Angus Smith, Rosemary Davidson, Sue Goode, Frank Hamilton, Joan Wilcox, Ian and Cath Craig, Bob and Betty Smith, Ethel Russell, Peter Vandome and Isla Wilkie.

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Responses to Langholm

The last issue of SBN dedicated several pages to a summary of the Joint Raptor Study. Several organisations including the RSPB have now issued their considered responses to this important study and we have summarised them over the first 2 pages of this issue of SBN.

The RSPB view

The RSPB has welcomed the report. It provides important evidence which should help to focus the minds of all those who have an interest in, or concern about, the future of the UK's uplands. Contrary to some misguided press coverage, the RSPB wholly accepts the findings of the Joint Raptor Study and hopes that continued cooperation between conservation and game interests will help to deliver long term, sustainable upland management.

It is essential to consider the conservation status of upland birds of prey, particularly Hen Harriers and Peregrines, upon which the study focused. The Hen Harrier is one of the UK's most threatened species, with fewer than 650 pairs, and may have declined significantly since the last national breeding survey in 1988. The Hen Harrier is on the Red List, and the Peregrine on the Amber List, of *Birds of Conservation Concern:* birds identified as in greatest need of action.

The RSPB is pleased that the spirit of cooperation of the research has been maintained in seeking solutions and that the majority of landowning and game organisations accept the report's focus on long term habitat solutions, and that killing of birds of prey is not a solution.

Key findings

Key findings of the Joint Raptor Study are

* *The continued high level of persecution on some moors.*
* *Long term declines in grouse bags have not been caused by birds of prey.*
* *The importance of habitat management*

Hen Harrier *Arthur Gilpin*

RSPB acknowledges the role of grouse moor management in helping to maintain the conservation value of the UK uplands. The other 2 main land uses - sheep production and afforestation - are less favourable to conservation of open moorland habitats. Legal predator control of Crows and Foxes probably enhances the productivity of other moorland species - especially for waders. The Joint Raptor Study identifies the loss of heather as the most significant issue, both in causing the decline in Red Grouse bags and attracting Hen Harriers. Effort put into halting the decline in the extent and quality of heather moorland should not only benefit grouse moor management, but also wider conservation objectives.

Overgrazing

Overgrazing by sheep is a major factor in heather loss. Subsidies for livestock production and afforestation should be reviewed, so that management for grouse operates on a more level playing field with other land uses. Incentive schemes which stimulate better moorland management should also be reviewed and enhanced.

Timely opportunity

The Agenda 2000 process, reviewing the Common Agriculture Policy and its subsidy system, is a timely opportunity. In partnership with other conservation organisations, the RSPB is currently identifying a package of measures which should provide the framework to attain these objectives.

In the short term the RSPB recognises that, if illegal killing of birds of prey ceases, some moors will face a problem during the years until habitat improvement delivers increased Heather cover. They are committed to working with other organisations, through Scottish Natural Heritage, to seek a solution for Langholm, currently the only estate which faces such

an immediate problem. There are no other grouse moors with similar densities of birds of prey and so it is unlikely that, with current levels of persecution, grouse bags elsewhere are affected to the same extent.

At Langholm, there is a need to reduce the impact of birds of prey predating Red Grouse, particularly during the breeding season. There have been suggestions that a scheme to remove Hen Harriers to other moors would provide a solution. It is clear that this will have considerable practical difficulties and would be costly. It may not reduce the level of predation on Red Grouse to the levels claimed without removing or killing adult Hen Harriers. The RSPB could not support this scheme as it currently stands. RSPB will be putting forward other possible solutions through the SNH initiative that do not require a complicated, expensive scheme or the control of a rare and threatened bird.

The gamekeepers' view

The Scottish Gamekeeper's Association has been the only organisation to publicly call for a change in the law to allow its members to kill raptors. They - incorrectly - stated that the Langholm Study confirmed that soaring numbers are having a serious effect on grouse and song bird numbers Raptors are *not* having such an effect on song birds but it seems to be convenient for some shooting interests to claim that they do to try to get public sympathy.

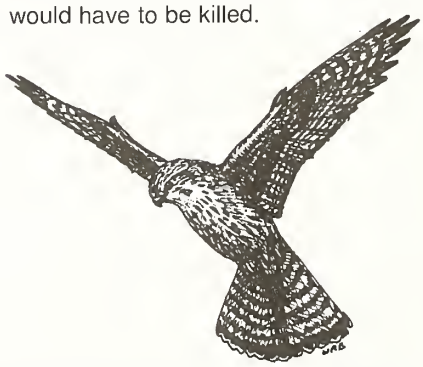
The estate owner

The Earl of Dalkeith, whose family own the estate near Langholm where much of the field work was carried out, has a good reputation as a landowner who does not condone the persecution of birds of prey. However, he was quoted in the press as feeling 'in a hole' - it costs £100,000 a year to maintain the estate but without enough grouse to attract shooters the moor may have to be abandoned. We understand the Ear has asked conservation groups to suggest solutions to his dilemma.

Other ideas

Translocating raptors - in practice Hen Harriers - has been suggested but, as the RSPB has already pointed out, is almost certainly impractical. At present there are areas for the birds to colonise but such areas are only lacking harriers either because the habitat has become unsuitable or because of persecution. There is little point in legally moving birds from one area so that they are illegally killed somewhere else! Supplementary feeding of harrier chicks in the nest has been suggested, notably by the Game Conservancy. The idea is that the parents will be less likely to attack grouse at the time when their need for food is greatest. This approach has been used at at least one Sea Eagle nest on the west coast where crofters claimed that the eagles were taking lambs. Whether this approach would work with harriers, which do not usually scavenge carcass as eagles do, is doubtful. It could even lead to a further *increase* in harrier numbers! The related proposal, which recommends removing eggs which would be artificially incubated and the young released in parts of England seems unrealistic. The hope is that it would lead to a decline in harrier numbers by natural wastage which probably would not occur therefore we keep coming back to this barely hidden agenda - some birds would have to be killed.

Golden Eagle *Dick Balharry*



Kestrel *Bill Brackenridge*

Change in law governing Crow cage traps

A report on the use of Crow traps was submitted to the Scottish Office and, after a lengthy period of consultation throughout the UK, new conditions were attached to an Open General Licence signed by the Secretary of State on 23 December 1997. These include:

Every cage trap used shall be inspected on a daily basis when the cage trap is in use. At each inspection any birds caught in the trap shall be removed from it.

Where cage traps are left in the open but not in use, they must be rendered incapable of holding or catching birds.

In a remarkably short period then, the law has been improved to protect many wild birds from an unnecessary and unpleasant death. My thanks go to all those birdwatchers and walkers who provided material for the report which led to these changes. It now only remains for the users of cage traps to be aware that neglect or abuse of traps can have serious legal consequences - I hope that all such traps will be checked carefully across Scotland as soon as possible.

Dave Dick

Illegal persecution of raptors

The report from the Scottish Raptor Study Groups on the Illegal Persecution of Raptors in Scotland in *Scottish Birds*, the Langholm Report and the recent work on the persecution of Hen Harriers in Scotland by Etheridge, Summers & Green are timely reminders of the level of illegal activities perpetrated against birds of prey all of which are afforded the full protection of law.

Allan Stewart's article on the work of Police Wildlife Liaison Officers in the Tayside areas is, I hope, an illustration of police commitment to deal with a problem which has long been recognised. During the last 2 years there has been a significant increase in the network of PWLO's in all Scottish police forces. Recent poster campaigns funded by the Scottish Office have been designed to convey the message that wildlife crime is the responsibility of the police. The RSPB have carried out sterling work in this field for many years and it has to be acknowledged that on many occasions the level of police support in investigations was limited. Whilst wildlife crime might never be a major priority of the police service, there is nonetheless an increasing recognition of its importance, particularly in rural areas, and now there is a network of officers throughout Scotland who have the commitment to carry investigations through.

A major difficulty for police forces in determining what priority is afforded to Wildlife Crime is the absence of statistical data to quantify the problem. Although the RSPB publish an annual report on bird of prey persecution there have been some difficulties in reconciling their figures with the official statistical returns provided by police forces to the Scottish Office. A current study (Conway 1998 *in prep* A Report to the Scottish Office on 'The Recording of Wildlife Crime in Scotland) will hopefully assist in resolving this. However, in no way will it assist in dealing with the apparent scale of the problem outlined in the SRSG paper.

Although a number of incidents in the SRSG report will have been recorded in both official police statistics and contained in the annual RSPB report, the vast majority will not. Even in many instances where human interference has been shown to occur, implying that evidence beyond the merely circumstantial was available, no notification was made to the police. Whilst it is accepted that there may have been a perception that the level of evidence was poor, given the scientific and forensic capability now in this field, this is a matter for professional judgement. In addition, from a preventive perspective, we now have some experience in Tayside of working in a positive framework with landowners, gamekeepers and other interests to try and change practices. It is extremely early days in this process but there is some evidence to suggest it has a place in a broad partnership approach which embraces education and enforcement.

As an individual who has a personal interest in this whole arena and some field experience behind me, I can understand that many may not wish to become involved in the investigation process. Opportunities are always available for information to be provided confidentially. Such intelligence gathering can be vitally important to the evidence gathering process. Given the scale of the problem highlighted in the SRSG report, however, the only way to eradicate this problem in the long term is to work in partnership with the enforcing agencies. In the last *Scottish Bird News* the SOC endorsed the RSPB's plea to report suspicious incidents to the police. There is now a comprehensive network of Police Wildlife Liaison Officers who are anxiously awaiting your calls.

Bob McMillan

Bob is an Assistant Chief Constable in Tayside Police. He also represents The Association of Chief Police Officers Scotland (ACPOS) on matters of wildlife crime. Bob's interest in birds goes back many years and has included monitoring of raptors particularly Peregrines in Perthshire.

Goshawk *Doug Weir*

Gamekeeper fined

A gamekeeper on a Deeside estate has been fined £120 for using an illegal trap. James Davidson, who works on the Invercauld Estate, used a spring trap in the open to catch a Rook.

Davidson admitted one charge under the Wildlife and Countryside Act when he appeared at Stonehaven Sheriff Court. He had set the trap at the rear of his cottage to catch a Rook which had been eating Rabbits that he had snared. The bird, caught by a leg and barely alive, was later found by a passer by who called the police.

Davidson had claimed thaSSSSt the trap was near his house and not likely to catch protected raptors.

Glenfeshie sale

Many papers have already reported the anger of conservationists after a consortium of public agencies and conservation bodies was out bid for the purchase of the Glenfeshie Estate. The estate agents of the previous owners, Will Woodlands, which bought the estate in 1994 supposedly with conservation objectives, announced that the land had been sold to a Danish company.

Scottish Natural Heritage submitted a bid on behalf of a consortium of SNH, Highland Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Forest Enterprise, the John Muir Trust and the National Trust for Scotland. Their bid was made with full government support and was based on an independent valuation of the estate. The sale price was said to be around £6.3 million, over £1 million more than Will Woodlands paid for the estate 3 years ago.

The new owner of the estate is Danstrup Land Holdings described as a Danish company in the ownership of Mr Klaus Helmerson and his family. An advisor to Herr Helmerson has been quoted as saying that Helmerson had bought the estate because "he likes the idea of the salmon river, deer forest and the possibility of shooting and fishing and enjoying nature. We know there are too many Red Deer on Glenfeshie and we would like to increase the shooting so that the trees can recover. It is a matter of how quickly you would like the trees to come on. We will not be making any fixed plans on how to go about that until about 6 months time."

Helmerson is not expected to spend more than a few weeks of the year on the estate.

Keeping an eye on Scotland's breeding birds

Little Grebe *David Mitchell*

Since 1962, the Common Bird Census (CBC) has been keeping track of UK bird populations. From 200-300 plots have been surveyed annually by keen volunteers providing us with the facts and figures on the changes in the populations of many of our breeding birds. A close look at the distribution of these plots shows a concentration in south and east of the UK with, at best, 25 plots in Scotland.

Realising the shortcomings of the CBC, the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) was introduced in 1994. The BBS has been designed to overcome the problem of bias by randomly choosing survey plots throughout the country ensuring that all habitats are covered. This means more species will be monitored, including many not monitored as part of a national scheme before.

Major differences

There are major differences between the BBC and the CBC. We needed the new survey to be as quick and simple as possible, thereby enabling more volunteers to participate. Rather than the detailed and time consuming territory mapping method of the CBC, the BBS uses line transects and is based on a 1x1 km square visited just 3 times per year - once to work out 2 routes across the square and to record habitat type and a further 2 visits at least a month apart to count all birds heard or seen.

We are keen to illustrate that we can glean much sought after information about Scottish bird populations from the BBS. We are also able to collect vital data on widespread species, such as Song Thrush. In UK terms, this species has undergone a serious decline of around 60% since 1970. These data come from the CBC based largely in England. Is the decline less severe in Scotland? In a few years, the BBS will be able to tell us. There may well be a host of other species whose populations dynamics differ significantly from those south of the border.

Emerging trends

To monitor bird populations with accuracy, each species needs to be recorded from between 50 to 100 squares annually. In 1996, an encouraging 45 species were recorded to this degree, including many upland species which we are able to monitor for the first time, such as Buzzard, Wheatear and Meadow Pipit.

An earlier report in SBN mentioned the role the BBS will play once trends start to emerge. Many of the feelings expressed in the article are echoed in the preliminary results of the BBS using date from 1994-96. A significant increase in Magpie numbers in Scotland is in contrast to their near stable status in the UK as a whole. Continued declines in Swallow numbers caused concern but both Whinchat and Wheatear are increasing significantly. Scottish BBS results also back up what many observers have noticed with Spotted Flycatcher decreasing significantly but Willow Warblers increasing. The significant decline reported in Wren numbers is also mirrored in BBS results whereas Song Thrushes remained stable. Siskins also appear to be doing very well with significant increases from Scotland BBS data.

Geographical spread

It is important that we maintain our good geographical spread of survey squares and to increase the number of squares covered each year we issue new squares on an annual basis. We are always on the look out for new volunteers since the more data we collect in Scotland, the more complete our picture of population trends. Squares are selected by observer density to ensure more squares are issued where there are more people.

Of 470 coverable squares randomly selected in Scotland, around 330 (70%) have been covered in 1997; a great success. By randomly selecting the squares, a small percentage will be located in remote areas. While it is unlikely that some of these squares will be covered, overall this is not too much of a problem for the survey as long as the numbers of uncovered squares is small.

Feedback

Quick feedback to volunteers and conservation organisations is a key aim of the survey. Each participant receives a BBS Annual Report which details the progress of the survey so far and includes a summary of the results. We are also keen to provide regional summaries to bird reports throughout the country. Local birdwatchers often face a problem finding information about common birds such as Robin and Blue Tit. A regional BBS summary, available on request from the BTO, can provide this. Several Scottish Bird Reports have already included BBS information such as the Argyll and Borders Bird Reports.

At the moment, we have just collected our fourth year of data. There are a few gaps in coverage which we are very keen to fill in the coming years. We still need to encourage more volunteers to take part. Between 50 and 60 remote squares in the north and west are covered by RSPB professionals. RSPB support has been essential in providing BBS coverage of remote parts of Scotland but we are keen to find volunteers for as many of these squares as possible. A scheme as ambitious as the BBS would not be possible without the large numbers of volunteers taking part and generously donating their time to do their bit for the survey. We would also like to thank the RSPB, JNCC and the SOC for their support.

If you would like to know more about the BBS or would like a copy of the annual report (£5.00), please contact **Richard Bashford, BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk, IP24 2PU. Tel. 01842 750050, Fax. 750030, or e-mail r.bashord@bto.org.**

Danes threaten Sandeel stocks

Danish vessels are allowed to fish outside the UK 12 mile limit on an area called the Wee Bankie, off the Firth of Forth. Sources close to the Danish fishing industry reveal that poor enforcement by the UK has encouraged Danish skippers to regularly fish within the limit. The Danish fleet is thought to have taken over 1 million tonnes of Sandeels from the North Sea in 1997.

The Danish government is refusing to accept the advice of its own scientists who recently reported that the management of the North Sea Sandeel fishery breaks internationally agreed guidelines on the precautionary approach to fishing and recommends a halt to Sandeel fisheries in sensitive areas close to seabird colonies such as the Wee Bankie. Sandeels make up about half the catch of industrial fish species which, in turn, account for about half the tonnage of fish landed annually from the North Sea. Apart from the small inshore Shetland fishery, there are no catch limits for Sandeels in the North Sea.

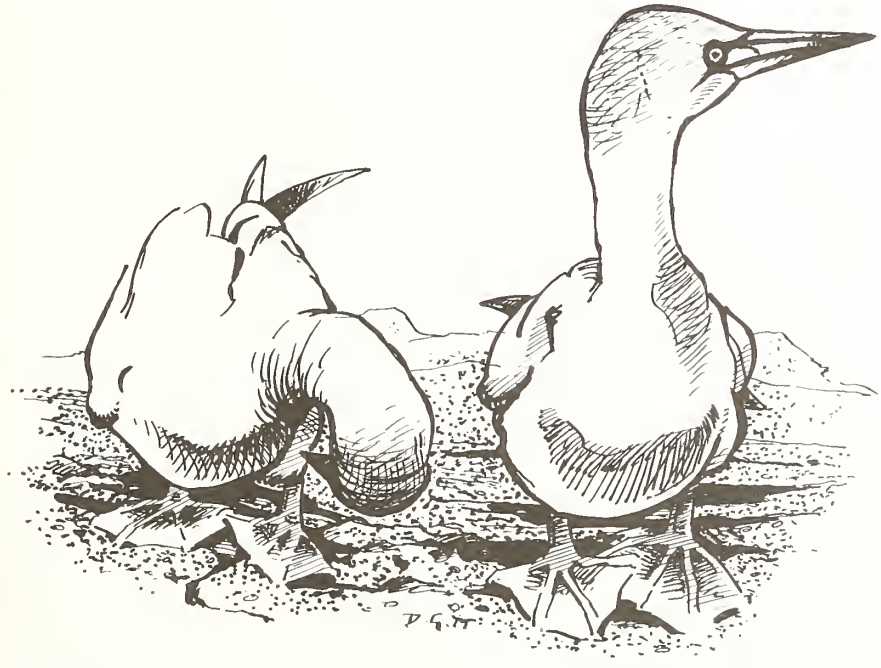
St Abbs Head Special Protection Area

This site is well known to members in south east Scotland. St Abbs qualifies as an SPA as it holds an internationally important population of Guillemots, with 31,750 individuals recently counted on the cliffs. This represents 3% of the British breeding populations and 1% of the total European population. The St Abbs Head to Fast Castle cliffs also support nationally important populations of Kittiwakes (21,170 pairs), Razorbills (2180 birds and Shags (560 pairs). However, the Scottish Office's decision not to include nearby areas of the sea within the SPA is disappointing. Seabirds spend only a small part of their lives ashore and depend entirely on the sea for their food.

Seabird centre for North Berwick

After 5 years of work, the plan to create a seabird centre on the shores of East Lothian is finally coming true thanks to lottery cash. The £2.4 million plan to beam live pictures of bird colonies on the Bass Rock to a centre in North Berwick will become reality. Cameras will be installed on the Bass and an estimated 56,000 visitors a year will be able to view one of the world's largest Gannet colonies without disturbing the birds.

Once head of computer graphics for the BBC in London, Bill Gardner moved to North Berwick in 1987. As vice chairman of the local community council Bill knew the harbour area should be North Berwick's key attraction but the derelict pool is hardly attractive. He felt what the town badly needed was a new focus for its tourism. The Scottish Seabird Centre should be complete by spring 2000.



Gannets *John Busby*

Charles Frank

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Managing the sea for birds - the Outer Firth of Forth

Protecting sea birds at their breeding colonies is relatively easy. Protecting the marine environment on which they and other aquatic birds depend is much harder. RSPB has just produced an interesting management plan to illustrate how this could be done. The Firth of Forth is a distinctive feature of the east coast of the UK and an area of international importance for its bird life. It is 26km wide across the entrance between North Berwick and Fife Ness and more than 60km long. Tidal waters move upstream as far as Stirling but the main section of the estuary, which is generally described as the Inner Firth, is the relatively narrow channel between Stirling Bridge and the bridges at Queensferry. The more open waters, from the bridges east to the Isle of May and the Bass Rock, are known as the Outer Firth and it is this area, together with the open sea further offshore, which is the focus of this study.

International importance

The Outer Forth and adjacent offshore waters are of international importance for birds. Most of the seabird colonies within the Forth have some form of protection. There are a total of 24 SSSIs on the Forth estuary, the majority of which include intertidal areas. Intertidal areas of the Inner and Outer Firth of Forth also qualify for protection under the EU Birds Directive and the Ramsar Convention. The Government has acknowledged this, but has yet to take action to designate these areas as a Special Protection Area and a Ramsar site.

The sea around the nesting islands is not included in any of these protected areas but is no less significant for the breeding and non breeding birds which feed in these waters and gather to rest on the surface. Data on marine birds in the North Sea identifies the area as internationally important for Gannet, Guillemot, Razorbill and Shag. Estimates of bird numbers in the report include around 15,000 Puffins in the Outer Firth of Forth and adjacent offshore waters between April and July, 29,000 Razorbills during October and November and around 58,000 Guillemots between September and October.

Large numbers of wintering seaducks such as Eiders, Common Scoters and Red-breasted Mergansers gather in bays on the northern and southern shores to feed. Further inshore, seaducks such as Scaup, Eider and Goldeneye used to be found in large numbers off the southern shore between Leith and Musselburgh in the 60s and 70s but the numbers dropped following reductions in discharges of distillery waste and untreated sewage.

Time of year

Different parts of the Forth and its offshore waters are important at different times of year. The Seabirds at Sea Team report

Arctic Tern *Sidney Clarke*

Populations of breeding seabirds of the Outer Forth Islands in 1994

Species	1994 totals	counting unit	% British population	% European population	% World population
Fulmar	1,607	nests	0.3		
Gannet	39,751	aos	24.3	17.7	15
Cormorant	434	nests	6.6		
Shag	654	nests	1.4		
Eider	2,342	nests	7.6		
Lesser bb Gull	7,207	pairs	8.7	3.5	
Herring Gull	13,025	pairs	8.1	1.2	
Great bb Gull	18	nests	0.1		
Kittiwake[1]	5,303	nests	1.1		
Sandwich Tern	129	nests	0.9		
Roseate Tern	9	nests	6.9		
Common Tern	306	nests	2.4		
Arctic Tern	540	nests	0.7		
Guillemot[1]	24,689	birds	2.4		
Razorbill[1]	2,479	aos	2.5		
Puffin[2]	20,106	aos	3.4		

aos = apparently occupied sites

[1] = not including Bass Rock population

[2] = 1993 figure, for Isle of May only

(based on Forth Estuary Forum *in prep*)

[NB. European and world % are only recorded on the table when greater than 1%]

that seaducks and divers tend to be present offshore in large numbers during the winter months from January to March. Around this time there may also be high densities of Guillemots off the east coast of Scotland and some Gannets starting to move to the colony at the Bass Rock. By spring, birds moving northwards to their breeding grounds, such as Red and Black-throated Divers, increase in numbers and Puffins start to return to their colonies.

During the summer there are obvious concentrations of birds around breeding colonies. There is also considerable movement of birds over extensive areas as they forage. Gannets, for example, can travel 100km from their colonies to feed. By July, the breeding season is coming to an end and adults and juveniles start to move to moulting andwintering areas. Adult auks begin to moult, at which time they are flightless, and usually seen in large rafts on the water. Young Gannets, which are initially flightless, can also be seen on the water. Autumn still sees large concentrations of auks in waters offshore and high numbers of Kittiwakes. During November and December there are large concentrations of Guillemots and low densities of Puffins.

Wildfowl of national and international importance in the Inner Forth and Outer Firth of Forth

Species	Mean winter peak (89/90-93/94)	% British population	% European population
Great Crested Grebe	728	7.3	
Cormorant	761	5.9	
Pink-footed Goose	13,335	7	7
Shelduck	3,030	4	1.2
Teal	1,764	1.3	
Scaup	188	1.7	
Eider	8,297	11.1	
Long-tailed Duck	595	2.6	
Common Scoter	1,401	6.1	
Velvet Scoter	226	7.5	
Goldeneye	2,031	11.9	
Red-breasted Merganser	495	4.9	

(from Forth Estuary Forum, *in prep*).
[NB. European % is only recorded on the table when greater than 1%]

Human activities

Approximately 1.4 million people live in the catchment area of the Firth of Forth. There is considerable commercial activity in and around the estuary with ports, power stations and other industries on its shores. The Forth Navigation Service deals with around 23,000 vessel movements a year and Leith has the largest enclosed dock system on the east coast of Scotland. Oil from the Forties Field is piped ashore to refineries at Grangemouth and Mossmorrran. The oil and gas which comes ashore by pipeline is piped from the Hound Point and Braefoot terminals.

Fishing

Changes resulting from human activities can be seen particularly well in the changing patterns of fishing. In the late 18th century Mussels and Oysters were collected for human consumption. Today, Winkles, Cockles and Mussels are collected from the shore, and a Whelk fishery has started to build up. Herring and Sprats used to be a large part of the fish catch but, although the Forth remains an important nursery area for Herring, the Forth grounds are closed to these fisheries. Crabs and Lobsters are taken from the rocky areas but the most valuable species landed in the region is the Dublin Bay Prawn. Outside the firth the main bottom living species which are taken are Cod, Haddock, Whiting, Plaice and Lemon Sole. There is also a seasonal summer fishery for Sandeels on the offshore banks when a fleet of mainly Danish vessels trawl in the area. Recorded catches rose from 3,000 tonnes in 1990 to 115,000 tonnes in 1993, and then started to decline. The most recent figure is 32,000 tonnes in 1995.

Tourism and recreation are other important activities in the area. A giant aquarium opened in 1993 at Queensferry and attracts up to 450,000 visitors a year. Watersports are popular with sailing, angling, bathing and windsurfing. The possibility of a European Ro-Ro ferry terminal in the Forth is under discussion.

A protected area for the Outer Forth

The Forth Island Special Protection Area (SPA) covers the nesting sites used by the major seabird colonies on the islands. Unfortunately, no protection is given to important feeding areas at sea.

The most obvious areas are in the immediate vicinity of breeding colonies. The sea adjacent to breeding colonies can be important as feeding and resting areas. Around the Isle of May, Puffins and Guillemots are often seen feeding in the tide rip. Young auks, in particular, gather just offshore after leaving nest sites and are especially vulnerable at this time as they are flightless. Birds nesting on the Isle of May are some of the best studied seabird populations; however, information on foraging areas is limited though useful data has been obtained by radio tagging.

The RSPB study recommends that a boundary be drawn around the Outer Firth of Forth and adjacent offshore waters in recognition that the whole region is important for birds. A single larger site would make the management task easier as well as give better protection.

The EU Birds Directive requires the designation of Special Protection Areas for Annex 1 birds and for regularly occurring migratory species. This Directive came into force in 1979. Despite progress by the Government in designating intertidal areas as SPAs, the designation of SPAs below the low water mark has been neglected over the intervening 17 years.

A management plan for the Outer Firth of Forth and adjacent offshore waters has been prepared to show what might be required. Acknowledging that the bird interest of the site does not end at the limits of UK territorial waters, the proposed boundary of the site includes a sector beyond these limits.

The main challenge is undoubtedly the management of fisheries.

The full report Managing the sea for birds - the Outer Firth of Forth (1997) was commissioned by the RSPB. A copy is in the Waterston Library.

Managing the sea for birds - Fair Isle

Fair Isle and its adjacent seas form the subject of the second illustrative plan for an important marine area published by RSPB. Given the unique position of Fair Isle there are differences in the way the plan has been prepared to that for the Firth of Forth, notably input from the Bird Observatory and the islanders. Fair Isle's rich marine environment has a long history of supporting both its human community and its internationally important seabird populations. However, during the 1980's, in common with the rest of Shetland, a series of seabird breeding failures prompted serious concern on the island and among conservationists.

The importance of Fair Isle

Fair Isle is the most isolated single island in the British Isles. The Isle is very small (1069 ha), roughly rectangular and mainly bounded by high cliffs. All coasts are deeply dissected, mainly by geos; offshore stacks abound.

The entire Fair Isle coastline and moorland were notified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest in 1963 and designated as a Special Protection Area in 1994. The varied nature of Fair Isle's cliffs provides suitable sites for seabird colonies.

Fair Isle is of national importance for 9 seabird species and of international importance for 2. Cliffs support Fulmars, Gannets, Shags, Kittiwakes, Guillemots, Razorbills, Puffins and Black Guillemots. Moorland supports Britain's fourth largest Arctic Skua colony, and significant numbers of breeding Great Skuas and Arctic Terns. A small Common Tern colony is one of the northernmost in Britain. Other seabird species breeding at cliff sites are Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull and Great Black-backed Gull. Small numbers of Common Gulls and Eiders breed. There is also a small breeding colony of Storm Petrels. Fair Isle's endemic subspecies of Wren, listed on Annex 1 of the EU Wild Birds Directive, breeds almost exclusively on the cliffs.

The cliff vegetation of Fair Isle is extremely rich and colourfull as it is undisturbed by grazing and benefits from the fertilising effect of seabird droppings. The regionally rare prostrate Juniper grows on some cliffs. Fine examples of coastal grassland and coastal heathland occur above the cliffs, supporting good populations of a number of nationally rare or notable plants, including Frog Orchid, and Small Adder's Tongue.

About 200-350 Grey Seals occur and pup in caves and on the least accessible beaches. Common Seals occur but do not breed.

Puffin with food *Sam Alexander*

Most recent counts of breeding seabird populations on Fair Isle

Species	Count	Year	Count	% British	% European
Fulmar	43317	1996	aos	8.0	
Gannet	1090	1996	aon		
Shag	946	1993	nests	2.5	
Arctic Skua	86	1996	aot	2.7	
Great Skua	120	1996	aot	1.4	
Common Gull	6	1996	nests		
Lesser Black-backed Gull	20	1991	aon/aot		
Herring Gull	107	1991	aon/aot		
Great Black-backed Gull	160	1991	aon/aot	0.1	
Kittiwake	18159	1992	aon	3.7	1.0
Common Tern	5	1996	pairs		
Arctic Tern	1250	1996	aia	2.8	
Guillemot	37563	1994	birds	3.6	1.2
Razorbill	3205	1993	birds	2.2	
Black Guillemot	224	1996	birds		
Puffin	42000	1995	birds	4.7	

data courtesy of Fair Isle Bird Observatory

aia - apparently incubating birds
aos - apparently occupied sites
aon - apparently occupied nests
aot - apparently occupied territories

Razorbills *Bobby Tulloch*

Intertidal and offshore zones

In 1987 Fair Isle's intertidal and subtidal zones were investigated and described as part of a general survey of Shetland inshore waters for the NCC Marine Nature Conservation Review. Nineteen habitats and communities were identified. The survey's conclusion was that the intertidal and subtidal sites must rank among the most exposed in the British Isles.

Relatively deep water occurs immediately offshore. There is a rich growth of plankton off Fair Isle in summer; this is in response to the combined impact of a relatively warm current, the North Atlantic Drift, and turbulence produced by weather and strong tidal currents. Pelagic fish are drawn to this food source and a second layer of predators to these, including other fish, sea mammals and birds.

The largest body of knowledge about Fair Isle's offshore waters relates to fish stocks. A large area east and south east of the Isle is considered to be one of the most important Haddock nursery areas in the North Sea. Fair Isle waters are also a spawning area for Herring, Norway Pout and Sandeels.

At least 13 species of cetaceans have been recorded in recent years including Harbour Porpoise, White-beaked Dolphin, Killer Whale, Risso's Dolphin and Minke Whale.

The majority of breeding seabirds, particularly those feeding on Sandeels, seem to fish within 5 km of the shore. Knowledge of seabird distribution in Fair Isle waters outside the breeding season is limited. However, recent surveys have shown important concentrations of Fulmars throughout, Gannets in January-February, Great Skuas in August-September, Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls in January-February and October-November and Kittiwakes throughout.

Human use of Fair Isle waters

Historically, trawlers were prohibited from fishing within a zone extending 3 miles from the shore. In practice, this allowed exclusive fishing rights for the Fair Isle community. This regulation disappeared with changes in UK fisheries policy, which has had severe repercussions for the island's inshore fishery. Fishing was once an important activity for the island community. Fishing activities were low impact and labour intensive, being undertaken with baited lines from small yoals. This century, Fair Isle waters came under increasing pressure from commercial boats, trawling for much larger catches than could be obtained by islanders. By the late 1950s, marketing of fish from Fair Isle had all but ceased.

Today, islanders still fish from yoals for their own use. Current catches from the island are predominantly Piltocks, immature Saithe and Haddock. Haddock is now scarce and Halibut no longer encountered. The pressure of trawler activity is thought to be a factor behind these changes. Figures for UK trawler effort in the North Sea demonstrate that Fair Isle waters are under intense pressure, being among the most heavily fished in Britain at all periods of the year.

Fishing for Sandeels was conducted by increasing numbers of trawlers during the 1980s, but a crash in stocks during the late 1980s led to a ban from 1991-94. Current trawler activity targets white fish, with boats mainly from Scottish mainland and Shetland ports. A considerable proportion of their catch is thrown overboard as discards, partly due to current EU regulations on minimum landing size; indeed, there are reports from fishermen of nearly 100% discards in Fair Isle waters. Recent research suggests that the Sandeel crash was mainly in response to environmental changes. However, intensive fishing of a declining stock may have exacerbated the decline. There is concern amongst the Fair Isle community that the trawlers are now reducing white fish stocks.

The case for a protected area in Fair Isle waters

The lack of integrated management of Fair Isle's marine environment has important implications for the human community as well as its seabirds. The marine resource sustains Fair Isle's modern economic base, most especially through tourism. The internationally important seabird populations are viewed by islanders as an important economic resource due to their capacity to attract visitors. Management of Fair Isle waters for conservation objectives would, therefore, bring benefits to the islanders and other groups:

Existing SPA protection

Fair Isle has already been designated a Special Protection Area. Does the current SPA achieve its objective of protecting the bird species for which it was designated? The current SPA boundary is restricted to the terrestrial area. However, the surrounding marine environment is not given any specific management measures. Recent fluctuations in seabird breeding productivity and inshore fish stocks have caused serious concern amongst the Fair Isle community.

The concept of a marine protected area in Fair Isle waters has the enthusiastic backing of the Fair Isle community and the National Trust for Scotland. An illustrative management plan has now been prepared. The plan suggests an administrative framework for the proposed protected area and the management measures that may be necessary. Four elements are considered essential for the administrative framework. These are the establishment of a committed management group, with local representation; close liaison between this and the authorities; promotion of the site to the public; and establishment of an environmental management system open to public scrutiny.

The full 60 page report Managing the sea for birds - Fair Isle and adjacent waters (1997) was written by N J Riddiford and G Thompson on behalf of FIBOT, the Fair Isle Community Association, NTS and RSPB. A copy is in the Waterston Library.

Those Bonxies!

Anyone who regularly reads the Shetland Bird Club Newsletter will be aware of current concerns about the impact of predation by Bonxies on other seabird. The story goes something like this. Before the mid eighties breeding Great Skuas preferred to feed on energy rich Sandeels. Everyone knows what happened next - the Sandeel shortage. Among the species that survived this shortage apparently unscathed was the Great Skua. Its solution was to exploit alternative food sources more fully, one of which was the eggs, chicks and adults of other seabird species. Just how much of a recovery there has been in Sandeels stocks, is arguable but levels now are certainly higher than they were during the late eighties. However, some argue that Bonxies have developed such a taste for 'nouvelle cuisine' they they are still hammering other seabirds.

Great Skua chick *Sam Alexander*

Impact

Just how much truth is there in all this and just what sort of impact, if any, is this predation having on other seabird species? Observations by SNH wardens on Noss and at Hermaness, FIBOT on Fair Isle, and SOTEAG and the RSPB at various sites throughout Shetland indicated that predation levels, and the levels of seabird meat in Bonxie diet, were much higher in recent years than in the early eighties and, if anything, were continuing to increase. Furthermore, there have been recent dramatic decreases in Kittiwake populations monitored by SNH and SOTEAG. Given this evidence, SNH felt that it was time to try and quantify this problem and so a contract was issued to Dr Bob Furness of Glasgow University's Applied Ornithology Unit in 1996 to do just this.

The questions we felt it was important to ask were:

a) What is the proportion of various seabird species in the diet of Great Skuas, breeders and non breeders?

b) What proportion of the breeding Great Skua population are eating seabirds?

c) Are some breeding adult Great Skuas specialising in seabird prey, and, if so, what proportion, and which species are they specialising upon?

d) What is the impact of Great Skuas on other seabird species?

e) What are the potential implications of predation by Great Skuas for Shetland's, and Scotland's, internationally important seabird populations?

Methods

To answer these questions regurgitated pellets were collected from Bonxie breeding territories and non breeding clubs at: Foula, Hermaness, Fair Isle, Noss, Fetlar, Yell, Noness and Noss Hill (Spiggie). These sites provided a good mix of large seabird colonies and sites where Bonxies were breeding at some distance from large numbers of other seabirds. At the 4 key sites (the first 4 above) pellets were collected from a series of marked territories once every 4-7 days. This enabled the researchers to look at diets of individual pairs and also ensure that pellets (particularly of Sandeels) were not allowed to break up and disappear prior to collection and so bias the results. In all some 10,000 pellets were collected and analysed!

Findings

A brief summary of Dr Furness's report is presented below. The full document is available from SNH.

The first table shows the % of pellets comprising the main items consumed by skuas. Although he hopes to confirm it with future research, Bob Furness thinks it safe to assume that one pellet represents one meal and so we can draw the following conclusions from this table.

a) Even allowing for the fact that 4 of the colonies were visited on a less regular basis and at these some Sandeel pellets may have degraded and thus been missed, Sandeels appear to form only a very small part of the diet of Bonxies.

b) Whitefish dominates the diet of both breeders and non breeders. Don't forget that this whitefish is comprised of discards from the fishing industry.

c) Bird meat forms about 15-25% of breeders' diet at most sites, nearly 30% at Foula and over 45% on Fair Isle. This is predominantly gulls and terns and Kittiwakes form an important part of this group.

d) Bird meat seems less important in the diet of non-breeders.

Specialisation

Bob then considered to what degree individual pairs were specialising on seabirds. To do this he undertook a statistical analysis of the numbers and distribution of particular pellet types among territories within a colony. If there is no dietary specialisation then we would expect the pellets of a particular type, say seabird, to be randomly distributed through the territories. This was not the case but it is still difficult to define exactly what percentage of seabirds in the diet is required to define a specialist. It is important to remember, though, that birds defined as specialists in the table below show a tendency to favour eating seabirds, they are not exclusively eating seabirds.

It is interesting to note that the percentage of bird specialists was apparently related to the size of the colony, being lower in the large colonies.

The table below shows the % of pellets comprising the main items consumed by breeding and non breeding skuas.

Effects

We have an idea about the levels of seabird in the diet of Shetland's Great Skuas and have confirmed that some Bonxies are indeed specialising in seabird prey, but what does this mean in terms of possible impact on seabird populations? Dr Furness estimated that, in 1996, birds formed about 15% of the diet of breeding Bonxies in Shetland and about 12% of the diet of non breeders. By using a bioenergetics model he was able to calculate that the Shetland Great Skua population probably consumed about 200,000 birds during the 1996 breeding season! Consider 2 more points. The Glasgow work suggests that about half of these were adults, and 1996 was a good year for Sandeels. Casual observations on Noss suggest that the rate of predation was much lower in 1996 than it had been in recent years. There can be little doubt that the current decreases in Shetland's Kittiwake population are attributable to Bonxies.

Kittiwake *Jim Young*

The main items consumed by breeding and non breeding skuas

Site	% pellets Sandeel	% pellets whitefish	% pellets bird	% pellets gull/tern	% pellets auk	% pellets Fulmar
BREEDERS						
Foula	13.6	53.6	29.5	12.8	12.3	3.3
Hermaness	0	75.5	18.8	7.5	5.5	0.4
Fair Isle	0	46.4	46.8	38.7	3.0	1.5
Fetlar	2.4	71.1	17.5	5.4	2.4	0.6
Yell	0	75.6	14.6	12.2	2.4	0
Noss	7.1	70.5	14.2	8.8	2.8	0
Noness	0.5	72.0	23.9	16.3	4.6	0.5
Noss Hill	0	65.5	21.0	7.9	6.3	0
NON BREEDERS						
Foula	16.0	64.3	13.9	4.6	6.0	2.5
Hermaness	Neg	85.1	8.8	2.2	3.6	0.2
Fetlar	0	88.2	10.6	3.5	2.4	0
Yell	0	64.9	13.5	5.4	5.4	2.7
Noss	1.0	83.0	13.1	7.4	5.3	0

The distribution of seabird specialists

Colony	Number of bird specialist territories	Number of territories sampled	% of territories with bird specialists	% bird in breeder pellets sampled	Bonxie colony size
Fair Isle	12	12	100	46.8	130
Noness	8	11	73	23.9	few
Noss Hill	5	10	50	21.0	few
Noss	88	312	28	14.2	400
Hermaness	12	68	18	18.8	850
Foula	13	91	14	29.5	2100

The future

So, what of the future? The importance of discards from the fishing industry to Bonxies is evident from the first table. Future changes in fisheries management are, rightly likely to seek to reduce wastage. This will result in discards becoming less available to Bonxies which are likely to kill more seabirds. As to the rights and wrongs of managing Bonxies, that is something for wider debate. It should be remembered that, in global terms, the Great Skua is Shetland's most important seabird and the Government has international obligations to maintain the population in a favourable state. However some people might think that maintaining the diversity of Shetland's rich seabird colonies is equally important!

Paul Harvey
Scottish Natural Heritage

(This article was adapted from the Shetland Bird Club Newsletter No. 108. Summer 1987)

Shetland's Kittiwakes - the 1997 season

Paul Harvey's article on the diet of Bonxies in Shetland was written before the results of the 1997 summer's seabird monitoring was known. By far the largest Kittiwake breeding station in Shetland is on Fair Isle, where the 1997 census of nests found a total of 12,224, a 34% decrease since the last count in 1992 (18,451). A decrease was recorded on Foula by Tony Mainwood; 2,362 nests this year compared to 2,775 in 1996 and 4,306 in 1992. Elsewhere, breeding stations along the west coast of Mainland Shetland were surveyed in 1997. At some there were only modest decreases and some had even increased in size. However, the declines in north west Mainland were dramatic, particularly at the 3 breeding stations in the Eshaness area where the total of nests (313) was 82% lower than the last count in 1994 (1,730) and 90% lower than the peak count in 1989 (3,050).

All Shetland's Kittiwake breeding stations have now been surveyed during 1995-97 and the total of the latest counts of nests is 27,036, a drop of 50% on the estimated total for Shetland in 1981of 54,564.

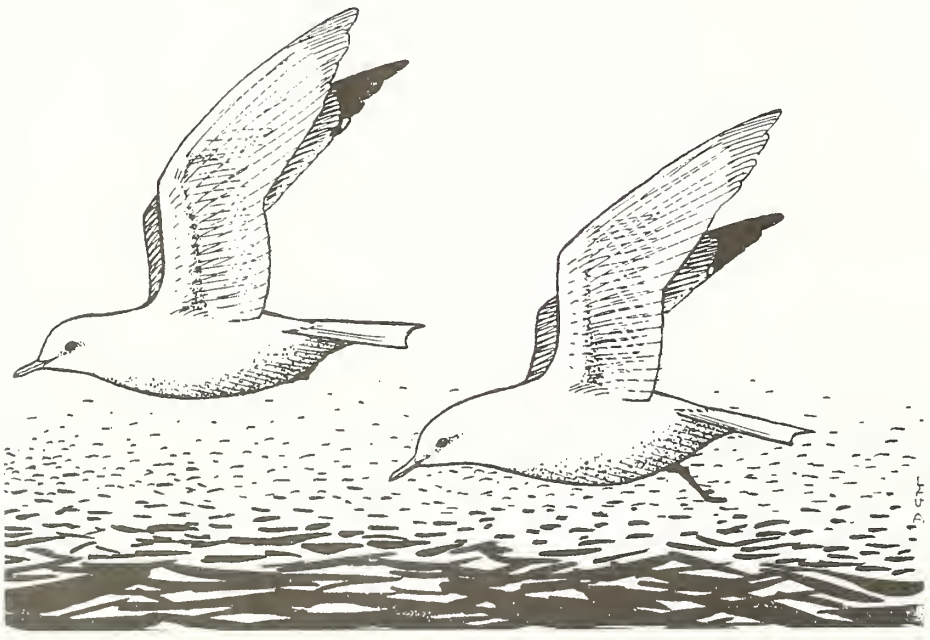
It had been hoped that during the mid 1990s we might have seen a modest increase in breeding numbers as birds fledged during years of greatly improved breeding success (1991-94), recruited into the breeding population and made up the shortfall resulting from the years of low success in the late 1980s. This, presumably, is what has been happening at some of the small breeding stations where there have been recent increases, although they may also be attracting experienced adults away from larger stations. Unfortunately, with the notable exception of Fair Isle, which has consistently fared better than the rest of Shetland, this year's breeding success was the lowest since the disastrous season of 1990. There were evident signs of food scarcity, namely a relatively high proportion of nests containing dead young and a rapid onset of broods of small young being left unattended. This was compounded by the high level of predation by Bonxies.

Kittiwake breeding success at 8 Shetland breeding stations in 1997

	Study plots	Incubating nests	Young fledged	Average success/plot
Fair Isle	10	?	?	c0.80
Sumburgh head	9	397	66	0.14
Noness	1	95	24	0.25
Noss	4	443	36	0.07
Ramna Geo	1	139	46	0.33
Westerwick	1	75	21	0.28
Eshaness	2	46	0	0.00
Hermaness	2	55	6	0.11

Actual breeding success for Shetland as a whole is likely to have been slightly higher that the 0.25/pair (0.17 excluding Fair Isle) suggested by these figures since pairs nesting in highly protected situations such as in caves, which cannot be monitored, will have suffered less from predation than those nesting in open situations. Hopefully, the apparent difficulties Kittiwakes had this year in finding food was a one off. If not, we are likely to see the rate of decline of the Shetland population accelerate once more.

Martin Heubeck and Paul Harvey



Kittiwakes *David Mitchell*

Shetland gulls

The biggest flocks on gulls ever seen in Shetland were attracted to the wreckage from the freighter *Green Lily*. The wreck led to the death of a helicopter crewman rescuing the freighter's crew. Shetland Islands Council hope the ship's insurer will foot the bill for the pollution clean up which will run into thousands of pounds.

South easterly winds drove large quantities of oiled flotsam on to beaches and islets, most of them inaccessible to vehicles.

Dave Okill, Shetland manager of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and an SOC member, said the pollution was so bad there were snowdrifts of plastic lodged against croft fences, 10 miles downwind from the wreck site on the Isle of Bressay. An environmental health officer said the biggest worry was thousands of plastic straps, which floated clear when the *Green Lily's* cargo of 3,000 tonnes of frozen fish was smashed out of the wreck by huge seas as livestock and wildlife could get tangled in it.

Mink on Sanda in 1996

With increasing numbers of Mink being recorded in Argyll over the past decade we have always thought that they could possibly reach Sanda, however we had hoped that the substantial tidal rip between the island the mainland would prevent natural access. Unfortunately this has not been the case as they have arrived and we find ourselves in the unenviable position of documenting the decline of the most important seabird colony in the Clyde. Our findings mostly relate to our June visit to the island group.

The discovery of several dried out carcasses of Manx Shearwaters in nesting burrows suggests that the Mink arrived in the autumn of 1995. We know that most of the seabirds arrive in the spring to breed and have left by August. As we found no evidence of predation while ringing in June and July 1995 it is probably that the Mink must have arrived after this time and have survived and probably bred by the time we returned in June 1996. Our counts of bodies only reflect those being killed over a very short period as we were only there for 2 weeks. This means that the counts represent the absolute minimum and we have to assume that killing continues at a similar rate throughout the breeding season.

We have found evidence of active predation at 3 separate locations during June and one additional site in July. Freshly dead kills were first found in the Black Guillemot colony on the north shore, where a cache of 5 carcasses wwas located. Killing continued here all week. Further bodies were found on the east shore in the Razorbill colony, and on Sheep Island where an area 20 feet in diameter had been cleared of all eggs, young and adults. The July trip located a freshly killed Storm Petrel in the colony at the Lighthouse. One female Mink was trapped and killed in a trap supplied by Scottish Natural Heritage.

Black Guillemot

A total of 12 dead adults was found in the colony; all of their nests were empty of eggs or young. Five bodies, left behind on the Sunday, were all eaten by Friday which may suggest that a family were present. This colony usually holds 20-25 pairs but by the end of the week only 8 adults were left and all the nests had failed.

Razorbill

A total of 20 dead adults was found between Sheep Island and Sanda; of these 6 were ringed. As we know from our retrap histories that approximately 30% of the population are ringed, it is the breeding birds that are being killed. Sanda holds between 2,500 and 3,000 pairs and is an internationally important site.

Shag *David Mitchell*

Manx Shearwater

Sanda holds a maximum of 200 breeding pairs and is the only know colony in the Clyde. Of the 40 burrows checked 6 contained dead adults, 30 had young and 4 were empty. This represents a loss of 15% of the breeding population in less than one year. As a hole nesting species these birds are particularly at risk. The fact that predated burrows were scattered all over the island effectively means that no part of the island is immune.

Puffin

The current island population is between 200 and 300 pairs. Two carcasses were found on Sheep Island. Unfortunately, only a handful of nests are accessible to us making it very difficult to monitor predation accurately. We will not be able to detect a decline until we can get late summer counts of adults offshore. This species is also at particular risk.

Shag

Five dead chicks on Sheep Island represented the only signs of predation and this species is not at immediate risk.

Storm Petrel

Sanda is the only known breeding colony in the Clyde area. The current breeding population of between 100 and 200 pairs is also being predated as indicated by the freshly dead adult found in July. However trapping results from a small satellite part of the colony resulted in only 10 birds trapped; in the past up to 40 of the breeding birds have been retrapped. This represents a significant decline up to 40% in less than one year. This species could easily be removed from the breeding list within a few years.

Gulls

Signs of predation were limited. Four Herring Gull chicks were found in the Black Guillemot colony but 12 large, nearly fledged young were killed in July further along the shore. Five dead Common Gull chicks were found in the colony in July; the cause of death unknown.

We know from work already done in Argyll that if adult Mink are trapped in March and April, when prey is scarce, the major threat to a successful breeding season has been removed. However this takes time, money and continued effort from year to year. We hope that we will be able to do this but it will not be easy. If we fail to protect Sanda's seabirds the loss of this colony is inevitable.

Rab Morton

Calls for Northern Isles salvage tug

Following an incident involving the tanker *Yusup K* in the Pentland Firth, RSPB and other conservationists have supported the call made by Jim Wallace, MP for Orkney and Shetland, that a salvage tug should be stationed in the Northern Isles.

During the latest incident, when a 10,000 ton tanker carrying highly explosive naptha drifted to within a mile of the Catihness coast, the salvage tug stationed at Stornoway, Western Isles, was called to assist small tugs based in Orkney. The Stornoway tug took 7 hours to arrive. In a true emergency this response time could prove disastrous. This incident served as a warning that these are busy traffic routes which can prove treacherous to vessels, and highlights the importance of adopting Lord Donaldson's recommendations following the *Braer* disaster of 1993, that salvage tugs be available to prevent potential disasters from becoming actual disasters.

REVIEWS

The Birds of the Western Palearctic - concise edition. *1997. Edited by D W Snow and C M Perrins. OUP. 2 volumes in slipcase. 1926pp. £150. ISBN 0 19 854099X*

Twenty years ago the first volume of *The Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa* subtitled *The Birds of the Western Palearctic* was published. The title was quickly shortened down to *BWP*. Over the next 17 years a further 8 volumes saw the light of day. The editors and hundreds of experts made this massive work a wonderful reference book. What it was not was user friendly; the huge amount of data was difficult to handle, especially in small type.

Now, 3 years after BWP was completed, comes a concise edition. The job of condensing the huge mass of information was a monumental task and naturally large slabs have been removed or drastically reduced. For example, the voice section has no sonagrams; Social pattern and Behaviour has been reduced by 80-90%; all the comprehensive weights and measurements have been reduced to a couple of lines. Habitat is halved while the Field Characters is much shorter than *BWP* and somewhat disappointing. Some of the latest field guides are more comprehensive and helpful. What is impressive are the Distribution and Population sections with expanded data, utilising the latest research from many countries. The majority of the species now have a single map but these have been updated and seem very accurate.

There are an additional 83 species. Some species in *BWP* which were dealt with briefly, since they were so rare, have been given the full treatment. There are 594 colour plates, slightly more than *BWP*, but amazingly 231 of them are new. The quality of these greatly enhance *BWPC*, particularly as most are now next to the appropriate species accounts, instead of being lumped together in groups as *BWP*.

Those of you have read this far will be asking the question - should I buy? If you are the 'average bird watcher' and have not got *BWP*, the answer is yes. *BWPC* is browsable and easy to use but, remember, volume 1 weighs 7lbs 2oz so it is not easy to prop up in bed! If identification is your only interest then the latest field guides will serve you better but if, like me, you take a broader view, you will be happier with *BWPC*. Right, you ask, but I have *BWP*, should I still buy? The answer is a qualified yes. It depends on what level of detail you want. How often have you looked at *BWP* and found what you are looking for easily? Having *BWPC* should result in you enjoying looking at the species accounts and, interest wetted, go back to *BWP* for a fuller explanation. Lastly, £150 is not expensive for what you get - over 1700 pages and 600 colour plates, or, put another way, the price of a single good quality golf club.

Frank Hamilton

Skuas and Jaegers *by Klaus Malling Olsen and Hans Larsson. 1997. Published by Pica Press, East Sussex, £24. 190pp. ISBN 1-873403-46-1.*

This very comprehensive book includes 8 pages of colour photographs, numerous black and white photographs and 12 superb colour plates by Hans Larsson showing each of the 7 species and 5 sub species. it is a work of considerable scholarship with a 12 page bibliography.

The book is, firstly, an extensive aid to the identification of the different species, as well as morphs, ages and sex. Visitors to the Antarctic peninsula should beware that there are many hybrid Brown/South Polar birds waiting to confuse observers as the author admits.

The chapters on each species go into great detail about colour variations, measurements, distribution, breeding, food, wintering and calls when on the breeding ground. I was reminded of that remarkable man Fred Kinsky distinguishing individual birds by their calls at Cape Hallet in 1964. I found Olsen's maps of the ranges and migrant routes a bit difficult to follow, but there is no doubting the author's knowledge of every aspect of his subject.

The book overlaps rather with *The Skuas* by Dr R W Furness, a larger book published in 1987, but they complement one another in that this book is more detailed concerning identification and Furness contains more scientific data.

Angus Erskine

Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand *by B D Heather and H A Robertson. OUP, 432pp. £25 softback. ISBN 0 19 8501455.*

If you are going to do birdwatching in New Zealand you **must** have this book. It is not just for the identification but the conservation and research information under each of the endemic species is fascinating. The illustrations are acceptable and appear to cover all 328 species mentioned. This is a book you will enjoy reading in the evening as well as using during the day.

Frank Hamilton

British Birds their Folklore, Names and Literature *by Francesca Greenoak. 1997. Christopher Helm 239pp. £14.99. Softback. ISBN 0-7136-4814-7.*

This is the third edition of a work first published as *All the Birds of the Air* (1979). Although updated not all British birds are included - notable omissions include Montagu's Harrier, Roseate Tern, Cetti's Warbler and Snow Bunting. Even Crested Tit is missing!

The species accounts consist of lists of colloquial names, highlighted in panels, alongside an intriguing but highly selective text. The origins of some names are explained and the place of each bird in folklore, if any, is discussed. There are extracts from prose and poetry ranging from Ancient Greek and Saxon literature to the works of Shakespeare, Clare, Wordsworth and Ted Hughes. It is by no means a full reference work as well known poems concerning, for instance, Robin, Skylark, Nightingale and Kestrel are not mentioned. Instead, there is often too much unnecessary digression into status and distribution.

If you wish to find out more about the meaning of bird names there are other more informative dictionaries. For the persistent reader with an interest is folklore and literature there is much to entertain.

Richard Mearns

Field Guide to Birds of the Gambia and Senegal *by C Barlow, T Wacher and T Disley. Pica Press. 400pp. £26. Hardback. ISBN 1 87340332.*

This is a beautifully produced book, well-thought out, with helpful maps on the inside covers and the illustrations are excellent. There are thumbnail identification notes opposite each plate and these are expanded in the rest of the book. There are also detailed notes on status, distribution, habits, etc. The book concentrates on The Gambia but if you are travelling anywhere in the region this is a book you **must** have.

Frank Hamilton

Warblers of Europe, Asia and North Africa *by Kevin Baker. 1997. Published by Helm. 400pp. £32 ISBN 0-7136-3971-7*

This book covers the warblers *(Sylviidae)* of Eurasia and North Africa. It deals with 145 species of which all but one - which only exists as a single museum specimen - are illustrated in colour. Unusually all are by the author who is described on the cover as Kevin Baker but now wishes to be known as Jeff! Perhaps the initials JK would have been safer. Given the changing state of knowledge - and opinion - on classification of these birds the author has adopted a pragmatic approach which largely follows Voous and Peters but with a number of changes. It is principally an identification guide but does include maps and other information on distribution and movements.

Although the warblers that commonly occur in western Europe can be confusing to the beginner, their identification is now well covered by several field guides. This book will be most useful for anyone looking at warblers in Asia or - and this should certainly help sales - hoping to identify some rarity on a British or Irish island or headland in autumn.

The author has already written identification guides for ringers and his knowledge about the ways in which feather wear and moult can affect a bird's appearance has been put to good use in this book. The author has also consulted widely. The illustrations are of a good standard and to scale. Though warblers are often described as little brown jobs, many are rather attractive and the tit warblers illustrated on page 117 and the back of the dust jacket positively colourful. This is undoubtedly a useful book though rather bulky for field use on foreign trips, especially if trying to travel light. There are bound to be quibbles about a book of this type. I found it disappointing that ornithologists based in southern England still think that Lesser Whitethroats are rare in Scotland. However, the author does appeal for new information and given the remoteness of some areas some of these birds live in, he has done a good job.

Stan da Prato

FOR SALE

Ford Transit Autosleeper 1989 2litre petrol (unleaded). 52,000 mls, solid elev. roof, swivel seats (belts) 2 + 2 berth, cooker, fridge, pumped water, radio cassette, elec. Hook up, service history, excellent condition, £9,000 ono. Contact **Keith Macgregor on 0131-662-1754.**

TO LET

Self catering house to rent
Sleeps 7-9 (cot available)

A unique family house on the outskirts of Gatehouse of Fleet in the tranquil countryside of Galloway. Ideal for the ornithologist with many species of birds but with excellent beaches, golf courses, fishing lochs and historic monuments nearby to keep the rest of the family entertained! Dogs and children welcome. Weekly charges range from £150-£300. Contact **0131-445-1065** for further information.

Butterflies for the new millennium

The *Butterflies for the new millennium* project is based on a concern for butterflies and their habitats and the need to provide up to date information on all species as many species continue to decline. This major project was launched in 1995 by Butterfly Conservation and the Biological Records Centre and is the largest and most comprehensive survey of butterflies ever undertaken in the UK. The resulting database will be a vital tool for the conservation of endangered butterflies and a means of reviewing conservation priorities. It will underpin future recovery plans for butterfly species identified as being at risk of serious loss or extinction. The project is now starting its fourth year. If you are not already contributing butterfly records to the project but would like to, please write, sending a large (A4 - approx 9" x 12") SAE envelope (31p) to **Butterfly Conservation Head Office, P O Box 222, Dedham, Colchester, Essex CO7 6EY.**

A career in conservation?

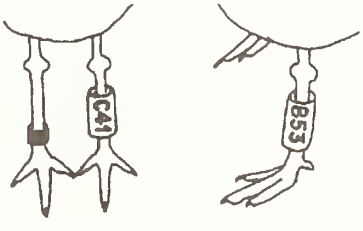
The youth unit of the RSPB has published a new booklet to help young people get information on the wide range of roles available in conservation. It should help youngsters choose the right Standard Grades and Highers and also advises on higher and further education. Jobs are featured in the 22 page careers guide include nature reserve warden, research scientist and conservation officer. There is also reference to jobs in marketing, public affairs and information technology.

Careers in Conservation is available from **RSPB Headquarters, 17 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh, CH7 0BD,** price £5 (including postage and packing).

REQUESTS

Darvic ringed Oystercatchers

Aberdeen is notable for a large population of Oystercatchers nesting on flat roofs in the city. This roof nesting habit was first noted in the early 1970s when there were about 30 breeding pairs. This has increased to about 250 pairs. Six adults and over 100 chicks were ringed in 1997 with a yellow or white darvic ring on the left leg bearing a unique combination of a letter and 2 digits (see diagram). Although primarily aimed at determining the site faithfulness of roof reared birds returning to breed, we are also keen to gather information on post fledging dispersal. Ringing indicates that Oystercatchers from north east Scotland move mainly south and west in winter towards Morecambe Bay and into Ireland while others spend the winter on estuaries along the east and south coasts of Britain. The rings are fairly unobtrusive and will probably require a telescope to read so any sightings will be gratefully welcome and acknowledged (promptly!) with a full history. Please contact either **Alistair Duncan, 12 Cairncry Avenue, Aberdeen AB16 5DS** or **Raymond Duncan, 86 Broadford Drive, Bridge of Don, Aberdeen AB23 8PP.**



Common Sandpiper Study - help wanted

A study of the breeding biology of Common Sandpiper begins in 1998 as part of a PhD involving Leicester University and Scottish Natural Heritage. The project will focus on the sex roles and breeding performance of birds as well as general ecology. Mating strategies will be determining by blood sampling and DNA fingerprinting. Adults and young will be trapped and colour-marked by Borders Ringing Group. The study site will be in the Moorfoot Hills. Assistance is needed for a 2 month period from mid April to mid June. Accommodation and other living costs will be covered and a small wage provided. Knowledge of bird ecology and/or ringing experience would be very useful. If interested please contact: **Allan Mee, Biological Sciences, Adrian Building, leicester University, University Road, Leicester LE1 7RH. Tel. 0116 2523350 or email: aam8@leicester.ac.uk."**

Colour ringed Shags

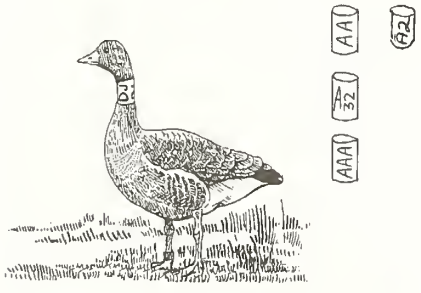
For many years Shags breeding on the Isle of May in the Firth of Forth have been colour ringed with yellow rings engraved with 2 letters. In 1997 as many as possible of the young were marked with white rings engraved with 3 letters. In addition, adults of known age are marked with similar red rings. This is a joint project between the Isle of May Bird Observatory, the University of Glasgow and ITE. Although adult Shags usually winter within 150 km of the colony, juveniles disperse. We would welcome sightings of any colour ringed Shag and will supply details of the individuals involved. Please report to: **Mike Harris, Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, Hill of Brathens, Banchory, Kincardineshire, AB31 4BY. Phone 01330-823434 Fax 01330-823303 Email m.p.harris@ite.ac.uk.**

Census of native Scottish Greylag Geese

A complete census of native Scottish Greylag Geese is currently underway. Organised counts have been undertaken during August/September 1997 primarily on Coll and Tiree, the Outer Hebrides and Sutherland and Caithness. However, Greylag Geese also appear in small numbers in other areas of north and west Scotland. I would welcome any details of sightings of Greylag Geese from any areas to the west of the Great Glen from **August or September** before the Icelandic wintering birds arrived. Please note date, location, flock size, habitat type, crop (if known) and please make a note of any coloured leg rings or collars seen and forward to: **Carl Mitchell, WWT, Slimbridge, Gloucester. GL2 7BT** Thank you in advance.

Colour marked Greylag Geese

Sightings of Greylags bearing dye marks, darvic rings or neck collars, together with details of colours and letters seen, no matter how incomplete, should be sent to: **Bob Swann, 14 St Vincent Road, Tain, Ross-shire IV19 1JR (01862 894329)**



This is DJ - collars should be read from the bottom up.

SOC NOTICES

Discussion Group - note change of date

The April meeting is **now** on 15 April. The other dates remain the same.

200 Club

Winners in the fourth quarter of 1997 were:
October - 1st £30 I V Balfour-Paul, Gatehouse of Fleet; 2nd £20 P M Collett, Thurso; M J Bickmore, Selkirk.
November - 1st £100 E M Smith, Edinburgh; 2nd £75 P W Sandeman, Killin; 3rd £50 E M McCulloch, Edinburgh; 4th £30 T C Johnson-Ferguson, Canonbie; 5th £20 M C Lawrie, Troon; 6th £10 M Lennox, Melrose.
December - 1st £30 H L Harper, Edinburgh; 2nd £20 M M C Woolgar, Edinburgh; 3rd £10 E C Renwick, Glasgow.

In the 200 Club's ninth year, which ends in May, over £1,000 will have been given to the SOC to complete payment for the projection equipment and pay for a new lectern and display boards. A similar sum will have been returned to its members in prizes. After 9 years over £16,000 has been raised, half of this sum being returned in prizes ranging from £100 to £10. Over £8,000 has been given to the SOC for refurbishment of 21 Regent Terrace and equipment for the Club's benefit; details are published quarterly in *SBN*. In the Annual Reports, Council acknowledges the value to the Club of the support given by its members, for which it is extremely grateful. A very warm thank you to all 200 Club members.

The tenth year starts on 1 June and renewal notices to existing members, who do not pay by standing order, will be sent out in April. At the time of writing (December 1997) there are 185 members. We just cannot seem to break the 200 barrier, so it would be great to do so in our tenth year! If you would like to join, or take out another membership, please write to me enclosing a cheque for £12, payable to 'SOC 200 Club'. This will cover the 12 months from 1 June, and will be acknowledged. If you would like to pay by Banker's Order, please contact me and I will send you a form. The only restriction to joining are that you must be an SOC member, and over 18. Do please consider joining if you are not already a member.

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire, TD6 9NL Phone 01896 822176

Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club. It is published 4 times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices need to be sent to the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace no later than 5 weeks before publication. The magazine acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and to disseminate information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. The views expressed in articles in *Scottish Bird News* are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication. The SOC also publishes the journal *Scottish Birds* which publishes original papers and notes on Scottish ornithology and the *Scottish Bird Report*. For details of these publications and membership contact the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

The 1998 Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference

The Fife Branch are organising the 1998 Conference to be held on Saturday 14th March, 1998 at St Andrew's University. The theme is Birds and their Habitats in Eastern Scotland. **There will also be local SOC led outings on the morning of Sunday 15 March.** If you are interested please phone 0131 556 6042 to see if any places are left.

The British Ornithologists' Union

Spring Conference & Annual General Meeting will take place at The University of Edinburgh over the weekend 3-5 April 1998.
The theme will be *Tropical Forests & Islands,* including the Alfred Newton Lecture presented by Prof Jared Diamond. The SOC will have a display at the conference and Ian Thomson will lead an outing on the Sunday afternoon for those interested.

For further information contact
Steve Dudley, PO Box 17, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 3EB. Tel 01842 755969

Thanks to

Once again, many thanks are due to the willing volunteers who came in to Regent Terrace in December to do the mammoth stuffing of the last mailing. They were: Chris and Angus Smith, Rosemary Davidson, Sue Goode, Frank Hamilton, Joan Wilcox, Ian and Cath Craig, Bob and Betty Smith, Peter Vandome, Norren Stabler and Jim Mattocks,

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THE SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Scottish Bird News

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Edited by Stan da Prato
Assisted by Pamela Black, Sylvia Laing and Joan Wilcox

JUL 28 1998
LIBRARIES

Townies answer back

Earlier this year, a March in London attracted the attention of the media - as it was designed to do - to the views of a pressure group describing itself as an alliance of country people. The vociferous marchers were happy to tell the cameras and reporters their purpose was to defend what they claimed were the interests of country people which for too long had been subordinated to the interests and opinions of the urban majority - who were regularly and contemptuously referred to as 'townies'.

The aims of the SOC

It has never been the aim of the SOC to become a political body which does not mean that as a club we have no interests in what politicians decide. Our aim, as set out in 1936 when the SOC was founded, has always been to encourage ornithology in Scotland and thereby contribute to improved understanding and conservation of Scotland's wild birds. Where our members live has never been a bar to membership. The only requirement for membership has always been an interest in Scottish birds. The only reasons why membership would be refused or, very rarely, be withdrawn, have been actions that harm birds, such as egg collecting.

Professionals and amateurs

The fact that we call ourselves ornithologists can suggest to the novice that the club caters mainly for scientists. In fact, many of the country's most able professional researchers are SOC members and greatly value such aspects of the club as its publications, library, conferences and discussion groups. However, if there is a typical SOC member he or she is an amateur in the best sense of the word - someone who carries out an activity because they love doing it. On this definition, many professional scientists are also amateurs!

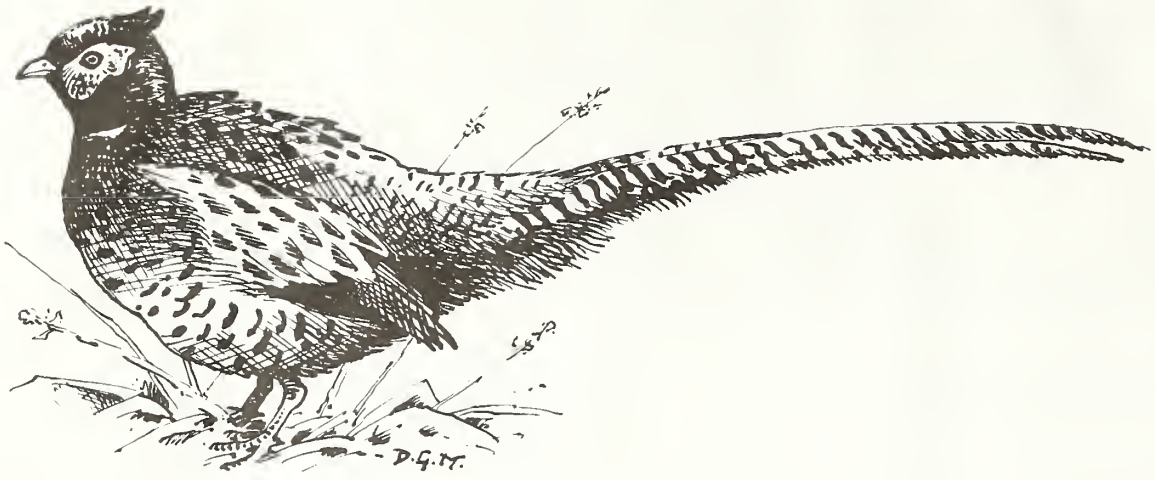
Intolerance

Why go over all this at this time? Because the London demonstration was only one very public manifestation of a current of opinion which runs counter to what the SOC has always stood for in favour of a attitude that says 'we know best because we shout the loudest because we know we are right'. This is the same attitude that demands that birds of prey, birds that eat fish or any birds that can conveniently be made scapegoats for problems that require some intellectual effort to understand, should be destroyed. It is this attitude that is behind the widespread flouting of the bird protection laws that still holds down the populations of so many raptors. It is fundamentally an approach based on intolerance and the frustration of people who cannot win their argument by logic so resort to emotion and, sometimes, worse. In the field of human politics it is the attitude which can easily lead to extremism, especially when linked to race.

Female Sparrowhawk with young *Bobby Smith*

Confusing the public?

When one examines what the Countryside March claimed to represent, the flaws in their argument soon appear. Their representatives have claimed that they are an umbrella organisation for a range of issues from blood sports to UK and EU agricultural policies, the BSE crisis, rural housing and more. However, these are very different issues and to claim that they



Male Pheasant *David Mitchell*

are all somehow linked and the fault of ignorant and unsympathetic town dwellers is nonsense. That may not bother the organisers, one of whose purposes seem to be to try to gain support for a relatively unpopular activity - hunting foxes and deer using packs of dogs - by mixing the issue up with others where public sympathy is greater. Even within the issue of field sports there seems to be a deliberate attempt to confuse the public with claims that all of these sports, including angling, are under threat when the reality is that only one form of hunting has been the subject of a Private Member's Bill and that was easily defeated in the House of Commons by a few opponents talking until it ran out of time.

Shooting and conservation

The SOC has never opposed the shooting of certain species of birds for sport since there is no doubt that sport shooting can be combined with effective conservation policies. In some situations, ornithologists can even lend support to control of some predators when there is a clear case for this; feral Mink on seabird islands, Foxes or crows affecting colonies of ground nesting birds are examples. However, in all these cases, we would expect decisions to be taken on the basis of clearly identified criteria, with specific and measurable aims, and to be carried out humanely.

This is very different from the position the Countryside March represents. They want to kill certain species in very large numbers because that avoids harder questions about the real state of the British countryside. If they did face these questions then they would have to explain not just the illegal killing of rare birds of prey but the widespread decline in so many species on farmland which cannot be blamed on predators but where all the available evidence points to modern farming. Unfortunately this rather takes the blame away from the 'townies'!

What is the countryside really like?

It is about time there was a more vigorous rebuttal of the Countryside March and its views on the basis is what is actually happening in the countryside. For a start, who are the 'townies' - presumably the majority of the UK population whose taxes contribute to agriculture and other rural subsidies? What about the many families who have had to move from earning a living directly from the land because of economic necessity? Drift from the land has been a feature of life in all developed economies. Recently there have been attempts to arrest or reverse this. However, this can often mean a change in rural employment towards leisure and recreation and away from farming and forestry. Furthermore, some of the most innovative 'incomers' to rural Scotland have been people from towns, some of them even English!

Most Scots have strong feelings for their country but we should never lose sight of the fact that most of our countryside, including the moors and mountains that appear natural, has been modified by people, often to a state of degradation. Birds and other wildlife still exist and some species, such as the Corncrake and many birds that nest on moorland, are at least partly dependent on human activities. This has led to a situation where some shooting and farming interests claim that their activities allow wildlife to flourish and, therefore, there is no need for anyone else to have a say as to how land is used. One Speyside landowner wrote to the press claiming that his land was the most important nature reserve in Northern Europe. If so why do we have to cross the North Sea to see a whole range of breeding birds, from Bluethroats to Cranes, not to mention all the European mammals that have become extinct in Scotland?

Rural realities

The reality of rural life is that ignorance and even cruelty still exist alongside much that is good. This needs to be faced by official bodies such as Scottish Natural Heritage who, perhaps because of the circumstances under which they were set up, sometimes seem too eager to accept the line that our countryside is wonderful and all its inhabitants are somehow beyond criticism.

One story may illustrate this point. In a recent radio broadcast someone in a prominent position in SNH was talking to an East Lothian farmer about the contribution that farmers made to wildlife conservation. It brought back childhood memories of seeing this same farmer ringing the necks of Blackbirds that had become entangled in the netting he had over his strawberry patch. This did not just shock me; it disgusted the countryman who had actually grown the strawberries.

But then he would never have joined the Countryside March.

Stan da Prato

Setback for Scottish White-tailed Eagles

The White-tailed Eagle reintroduction story has often featured in *SBN*. So far progress has been slower than hoped for but 7 pairs were successful in 1996 and 5 in 1997 fledging a total of 9 young each year. Some of these breeders were themselves born in Scotland, raising hopes that the Scottish birds are moving towards a self sustaining population.

However, over the Easter weekend egg collectors robbed a White-tailed Eagle nest on Mull only days before the eggs were due to hatch. A local shepherd noticed the distressed adults circling above the nest and notified Strathclyde Police and the RSPB who later found that the nest was empty and that the tree showed evidence of having been climbed. The nest belonged to an established pair and had been in use for several years. White-tailed Eagles only lay one clutch per year and this is a serious blow for the precarious Scottish population of which there are fewer than 15 pairs. It is beyond belief to most people that a number of sad individuals can destroy embryos so close to hatching purely to add to their personal and illegal collection of eggs.

Constable Ronald Sewell of Strathclyde Police said "We have been working closely with the RSPB in combating wildlife crime, and are very concerned at this latest theft. We request that anyone with relevant information contact **Dumbarton Police Station on 01389 822000** as soon as possible.

We have since learned that a second pair of White-tailed Eagles has been robbed in Scotland this year.

Scottish bred Golden Eagles and international crime

Senior Scottish police officers and the RSPB believe an international smuggling ring is taking wild Golden Eagles from Scotland to be reared abroad, then sold back in the UK as the offspring of captive birds.

It is known that for some years a number of eagle chicks have been taken out of Scotland. Several Golden Eagles chicks from known sites go missing every year and, according to Dave Dick of the RSPB, up to 8 young may be taken each year, but he only hears this from outside sources after the birds have been stolen.

One possibility is that the birds are smuggled into mainland Europe and go through dealers in Germany and onto Russia. They are then reared to adulthood before being reimported to Britain as captive bred birds from that part of the world. An estimated 70-80 captive bred Golden Eagles are in Britain, some of which are old enough to pre date the ban on taking eggs from wild British birds which was introduced in 1980, but many have been imported from Russia in good faith at a cost of up to £5,000 each.

Tayside's Assistant Chief Constable Bob MacMillan said "It is mysterious that over the past few years an allegedly legitimate breeding programme in Russia has sprung up which is extremely successful - the general view is that in fact what they are doing is creating a mechanism for laundering birds that have been illegally obtained. It seems strange that we cannot in this country successfully breed these birds in captivity, but we are led to believe the Russians can. There are breeders in this country who will tell you that this level of success in Russia is unbelievable. We are talking to Interpol regarding this, although proving the case may be impossible due to the sheer size of Russia, the small amount of resources available to wildlife investigators there and the fact that it is hardly top of their priorities. It is possible the same middle men in Germany who are involved in the smuggling of both the eggs and chicks and then the adult birds being brought back into Britain".

Inspector John Sellar, deputy enforcement officer with CITES secretariat in Geneva said "We have been made aware of this. Traditionally, there is a great interest in Germany in birds of prey and we already know that Peregrines stolen from Scotland have ended up there, so the smuggling routes clearly exist."

Steve Ford, from the British School of Falconry at Gleneagles, says he has seen dealers in the former Soviet Union selling eagles trapped from the wild. "It is important that these allegations are proved one way or the other for the image of falconry in this country" he said. "No responsible British falconer would knowingly use a bird which has been taken from the wild."

Every captive Golden Eagle in Britain must be registered and a record of its DNA made. Current DNA testing requires a blood sample which would be too dangerous and invasive to obtain from wild birds, but it is hoped a technique can be developed where just one feather from each of Scotland's 425 nesting pairs would aid the tracing of illegally reared birds.

White-tailed Eagles talon-grappling *John Love*

Illegally poisoned Red Kites

During 1997 a total of 7 Red Kites were reported to have been found dead and one was found injured. Six of the 8 birds were in their first year and 4 of these were confirmed to have been poisoned with another one suspected of being poisoned. All 4 poisoning incidents occurred on sporting estates. One was struck by a train and another flew into powerlines. One young bird was struck by a car near the nest site. The bird is in the care of a bird of prey centre and will hopefully be released back to the wild in 1998. Already in 1998 we have 2 reports of Red Kites being poisoned. One was found near Inverness early in the year and the other was found in Perthshire in March.

Extended review

The Golden Eagle *by Jeff Watson Illustrations by Keith Brockie and colour plates and landscapes by Donald Watson. Poyser. 1997. 374pp. £29.95. ISBN 0-85661-099-2.*

The publication of *The Golden Eagle* by Jeff Watson has managed to quiet the many voices calling for a first class summary of the many studies across the globe of this magnificent bird. Dr Watson, in one grand stoop, has managed to collect information on this interesting species from a variety of researchers, dedicated, and even not so dedicated amateur observers, and to put their findings into a readable format. Keith Brockie, and the author's father, Donald Watson, contribute significantly to the book through their illustrations. Keith Brockie's work shows not only technical skill, but also a love for the subject and speaks of years of fieldwork. Donald Watson's landscapes are in the style that is more fully displayed in his own book on *The Hen Harrier* and which give a true impression of the Golden Eagle in the field where sightings are often fleeting, at a distance, and in poor visibility.

The chapters follow the formula used in previous Poyser books, where a series of chapters take the reader through the breeding cycle and eagle year. An improvement is the inclusion of a chapter on Further Research. Each chapter has a useful summary. Chapters 1-3 give a general overview of the Golden Eagle, its range, field characteristics, and relations with other *Aquila* species. In Chapter 4 the author brings the reader to Scotland where history and enthusiasm have conspired to focus efforts aimed at understanding this relatively cosmopolitan eagle. In effect, this is bringing the story home, for I can think of no place more linked with Golden Eagles than the Highlands of Scotland. Fortunately for us this is also the author's home, so we are treated to accounts which are based on his own field work in his own country. This adds a personal touch and an edge of authority when speaking of eagles in Scotland.

Chapters 5-9 deal with general aspects of eagle ecology. These chapters focus on Golden Eagles in Scotland but bring in much information from elsewhere. These, along with Chapters 15-18, provide answers, sometimes not simple ones, for the most frequently asked questions about eagles: how long do they live? What do they eat? How far do they travel?. Chapters 11-14 describe the breeding

Golden Eagle and chick *Brian Turner*

cycle and are the glue that hold the whole book together, much as the breeding cycle holds the eagle's year together. In these chapters the reader is immersed in the yearly effort breeding eagles go through to ensure the passage of their genes into the next generation. If the other chapters of this book answer the question How?, these chapters answer the question Why?

Chapters 19-21 look back in time and towards the future. Real and potential threats and ways in which this species might be conserved within a changing environment are presented. I don't know if opponents of eagle conservation as a priority will view this as objective, unbiased treatment; Dr Watson comes down on the side of the eagles. The tables and figures are useful synopses of data. The appendices fill in areas where useful information exists but would have blurred the focus if placed in the main chapters. I found the bibliography to be most useful and would encourage those interested to use this as a source of further reading. The index is relatively user friendly and cross referenced well. Overall, the publishers have done a very commendable job, giving us another quality book for both reference and enjoyment. I did find one typo, but don't be picky! There may have been more, but I was too taken by the content to pay much attention.

As with any publication, the very act of putting pen to paper exposes the work to immediate obsolescence. The author prophesies this by identifying ongoing research and areas in which further work is needed. Whether this work gets done is not clear as it is a fact that the amount of money available for research into Golden Eagles is declining. Although I am sure that this book will weather the passage of time well, it may be an early contribution to a string of publications on Golden Eagles which are the result of a push in research and interest in raptors which began in the 1960's. Haller's summary of his many years of work in Switzerland was published in 1996 and could not be included in this book. Also, studies in Alaska, California, Idaho and Scotland are ongoing, and have not yet come to press. One absence is some of the work done in North America, which has not yet been published in the scientific literature.

Perhaps the book focuses too much on the Scottish situation. However, the reason for this focus is not insularity. It is a fact that much of the most recent work, including that on migrant populations, has yet to be published. I hope eagle researchers around the world will take Dr Watson's lead and publish! Also, the very breadth of the Golden Eagle's breeding range and its adaptability to local conditions make it difficult to toe the line between over and under generalization. Jeff Watson has managed this balancing act well.

I'd recommend that anyone who wants a good overview of the Golden Eagle buy this book. While you're there, pick me up another. Mine is already almost worn out from over use.

Michael McGrady

Correspondence: models of Golden Eagle home ranges

In a recently published Forestry Commission research information note (Golden Eagles and forestry, Note 292, 1997) the FC and RSPB collaborated to produce guidelines for use where future afforestation may intrude into Golden Eagle home ranges. These are used to model the core area of a range (defined as being where 50% of contacts with radio tagged eagles were made) and thereby limit the encroachment of forestry towards the nests.

However, the note only applies to the affected home ranges and fails to consider or recognise possible knockon effects or even the model's encroachment on adjacent home ranges. Only when devising the less important home range model are neighbours considered and this arbitrary division is of little real value when considering ranging behaviour.

It is apparent that the models were devised in an area with large ranges and pairs spaced at more than 6km as, when tested on groups of ranges in North Argyll, Harris and Mull, the core areas overlapped and were dissected by the range boundaries. No advice is given for making adjustments in these cases as neighbouring core areas need not be modelled according to the note. The only advice given is for the incorporation of locally obtained data which is usually described as too biased, subjective or anecdotal but, when applied to a range in North Argyll, the model was found to only accurately identify the nesting area, knowledge of which is required to create the model! I found it excluded known hunting areas and included, at even a 2km radius, ground unused by the eagles.

I considered the model was of no practical value in determining the value of land to a pair of eagles. However, conservation organisations are already insisting on its application in spite of it considering one pair of birds in isolation from its neighbours. Although the note mentions its use on a site by site basis site specific information can be of greater accuracy and reliability and I feel should be used in preference to the models as the latter wrongly confer importance on some parts of the range, they remove importance from other parts and are likely to be used without detailed reference to adjacent pairs.

David Walker, 5 Naddlegate, Burnbanks, Penrith, CA10

Reply

There has been a history of models of Golden Eagle ranging, but, before then there was the 'educated guess'. Usually the most accurate came from experienced fieldworkers. Conservation and development interests then would line up their experts to out guess each other. Despite the accuracy of some experts, it was seen as partisan and biased. This led to deadlock, and neither of the causes were advanced. Models aimed to codify the way in which 'experts' would make guesses about range extent and core areas.

A series of models has been developed for Golden Eagles. Leslie Brown used a map, a dram of whisky and a 50p coin to draw territory boundaries. Jeff Watson implied that the area within 4 km of the nest was most important by saying that afforestation could negatively affect eagle productivity when it exceeded 40% of the area within this circle. The model we developed is the latest.

Our model was written up as a Research Information Note (RIN) and was the result of 6 years of research on radio tagged, territory holding eagles in mid and south Argyll. Primarily, the RIN aimed at providing information on eagle ranging, especially for territories in which little or no field data existed. When applied to territories in which extensive fieldwork had been performed, the model is best used within the context of that local knowledge. The model needed to be easy to use, and required a minimum of a prior knowledge. It is difficult to accurately map the ranging behaviour of an animal over time. The RIN model does not escape this.

The RIN model identifies the outer boundary and core area of eagle ranges. It provides guidance on which habitats were selected by eagles in Argyll; open habitats were used relatively more than closed ones. Also, the eagles showed a preference for middle altitudes. The model identified important eagle areas best when pairs and their neighbours were included in the exercise. No data from our work suggested that core areas overlapped to any great extent, although they do elsewhere in the world. Eagles are territorial, and, at low densities, can fly over very large areas. This does not mean that all that area is important to the eagles' survival and successful reproduction. Many variables affect the location of the boundary and the territorial behaviour of the pair. To a certain extent, the boundaries of the territories studied in the RIN were an effect of the nearness of neighbours, and that was probably related to the 'quality' of the territory.

From our studies we were unable to codify the identification of distant, important habitats. Further analysis may clarify this situation, although we saw a trend towards a centrally located core area. Still, it is not unimaginable to have an eagle pair in a landscape where the nesting substrate is rare and not centrally located, and the main food resources have a patchy distribution (like Rabbits). In this type of territory, the RIN model might perform less well.

I do not doubt that Mr Walker's observations on a particular territory are a more accurate predictor of its size and shape than the model. However, the applicability of the boundary aspect of the model to other areas of Scotland (the

Golden Eagle *Mike Ashley*

south west, Angus, Speyside, Skye, and Mull) was examined. People who had long experience within certain territories were asked to draw the territory. At these the RIN model was then applied. The 2 drawings were examined, and, in all except one, there was a high degree of agreement. In the worst cases the observed territory was held within the predicted territory. The applicability of habitat and altitude aspects of eagle ranging in Argyll could not be strongly suggested because we did not have detailed eagle location data from elsewhere. The matter of measuring the agreement of core area size and location was more difficult because not all observers could identify the core areas, and because of seasonal observation bias. Also, the model does not predict 'stonewall' boundaries or core areas. In many places these can flex due to changes in disturbance levels, prey availability, local density of breeding eagles, and weather to name a few.

From a conservation point of view, the territories that do not fit the model are those that would benefit most from field work and direct observations. The RIN model has its limitations. We hope to improve the model ourselves and future work will make further improvements. Certainly, data from territories where the model does not work would be useful in making improvements. It is true also that either side of the conservation/ development argument can misuse the model, as models before it have been. However, the model does reflect the data collected on eagles in south and mid Argyll, and has proved to be accurate when used on many territories outside Argyll.

I have a lot of respect for Mr Walker's knowledge of Golden Eagles. I sympathize with him over the way expert advice is often viewed as biased or anecdotal. In some cases, this 'anecdotal' data is the information that is needed to conserve individual pairs. Because of limited space within a RIN, a full treatment of the ranging data was not presented. This may be the main shortcoming. A fuller exploration of the data is in preparation. We are also looking at ways terrain and physical barriers affect the movement of eagles, and examining ways of better representing these movements in a map and model.

Michael McGrady, RSPB

PS There is a similar exchange of correspondence concerning the use of range models for Spotted Owls in a recent issue of *Conservation Biology*.

Hen Harrier *Jim Young*

Hen Harrier attacking Kestrel

On 28 March 1998 as I was sitting in my car watching an adult male Kestrel hovering over a set aside field I suddenly noticed a male Hen Harrier, in almost complete adult plumage, flying straight towards it. A short chase then ensued with the harrier using its long legs to lunge repeatedly at the Kestrel. Suddenly the Kestrel whipped round and grabbed the harrier by its talons, the birds then spiralled out of control and crash landed on the ground. Both were still clutching each other by the talons and flapping their out-stretched wings, neither appearing keen to let the other go. After 30 seconds or so they freed themselves and stood up staring with partly out stretched wings drooping on the ground. Again, neither seemed keen to make a move. By this time I realised I was creating a traffic jam, so I had to move my car. This appeared to disturb the harrier, which flew off leaving the bemused Kestrel sitting in the field, where it still remained when I left a few minutes later. Although I can find no records of male Hen Harriers killing adult Kestrels, the ***Handbook*** states that they do occasionally rob them of prey. Perhaps this individual attacked this Kestrel in the hope that it might have been carrying a prey item but got more than it bargained for.

Bob Swann

The Isle of May in 1997

For the first time for many years, 2 new species were recorded. In the Spring a Lesser Grey Shrike briefly visited and in August a Two-barred Crossbill stayed for several days. The bird was a fine adult male and showed well around the Beacon. Information on the bird's presence was given over Birdline and many birdwatchers were able to visit and see the bird.

Occupation of the Observatory was good with few weeks when no visitors were present. Scottish Wildlife Trust working parties again provided assistance in helping to overhaul the traps, assisting with tree planting and helping to maintain the Low Light. 1997 saw a rather wet spring and early summer, which helped get the young trees and bushes established. The rain also helped with improving the water supply and, during the summer, a further large tank was added so, even in a dry summer, the Observatory will have sufficient water.

The Observatory records for 10 years have now been computerised,with assistance from Fife Nature Biological Records Centre and SNH. It is hoped that, ultimately, the majority of Observatory records will be on computer disk.

Ian Darling, Secretary

For more information on visiting the Isle of May Bird Observatory contact the **Bookings Secretary, Mike Martin, 36 Main Street, Ratho, Midlothian EH28 8RB. Tel 0131 333 1547**

Leach's Petrel *Ayrshire Bird Report*

Bearasaidh, 1997

Bearasaidh is a rarely visited island in Loch Roag, Lewis. Frankie Buchler, David Butterfield, Simon Foster, Alistair Pow and Andrew Ramsay worked there from 19-21 July 1997.

The main purpose of our visit was to try to ascertain whether petrels and shearwaters breed on the island. The weather was excellent for landing, but the full moon made observations of shearwaters in particular extremely difficult. We counted birds on the island but late summer counts are not valid in some species. However, due to the few visits made to the island any information is of value.

The island was covered with Ragged Robin and proved an excellent viewing point for cetaceans. The afternoon of 20 July was spent watching 3 schools of Common Dolphins and several Minke Whales. Both seem to favour the entrance to Loch Roag as a feeding ground. The dolphins were leaping out of the water and coming down with huge splashes.

Manx and Mediterranean Shearwaters *Andrew Stevenson*

Birds

Fulmar - It would appear that in the 1960s, there were fewer than 20 pairs. We counted 445 active or recently failed sites. Fulmars now breed under large rocks on top of the island. In addition, there were 9 and 14 visible young on the eastern and western stacks respectively.
Manx Shearwater - No birds were heard on the night of 19 July. However, the following night when the moon was behind clouds there was obviously a raft (small?) to the west of the island and constant shearwater noise. In addition, birds were occasionally heard in flight and one at least may well have come off the Old Hill. This latter island may be more suitable for shearwaters and Leach's Petrels than Bearasaidh. Landing is even more difficult than Bearasaidh. Bearasaidh does not look suitable for shearwaters. The only possibilities are than a few pairs could breed in the western cliffs or on the stacks. Part of a skeleton was found on top of the island but could have been taken there by gulls.
Leach's Petrel - 19 birds were caught using tapes over the 2 nights. None had fully developed brood patches. Burrows were excavated for smell and tapes played. There was no evidence of recent occupation although the fact that there are burrows suggests that at one time petrels did breed.
Storm Petrel - 91 birds (including 3 controls) were caught over the 2 nights. No evidence of breeding was found.
Heron - 1 on the island on 21 July.
Cormorant - 25 active nests on top of the island (on south east side), 2 had eggs; one had small young; 2 with large chicks and 20 had fledged young in clubs. At least 35 young were on the wing.
Gannet - Heavy passage past the island.
Shag - 66 active nests.
Eider - 2 females seen (no young).
Common Sandpiper - One flew past on 20 July.
Great Skua - 2 flew past on 20 July.
Great Black-backed Gull - 11 pairs - mostly successful.
Herring Gull - 47 pairs - many successful.
Lesser Black-backed Gull - 2 pairs.
Black Guillemot - Total of 6 adults counted. At least 15 nests were located.
Razorbill and **Guillemot** obviously nest in small numbers.
Raven - One bird present.
Wheatear - Female present 19-20 July.
Starling - One pair probably bred.
Wren - At least 2 pairs.
Meadow Pipit - One present on 20July.
Rock Pipit - 3 or 4 pairs with young.

Andrew Ramsay

Charles Frank

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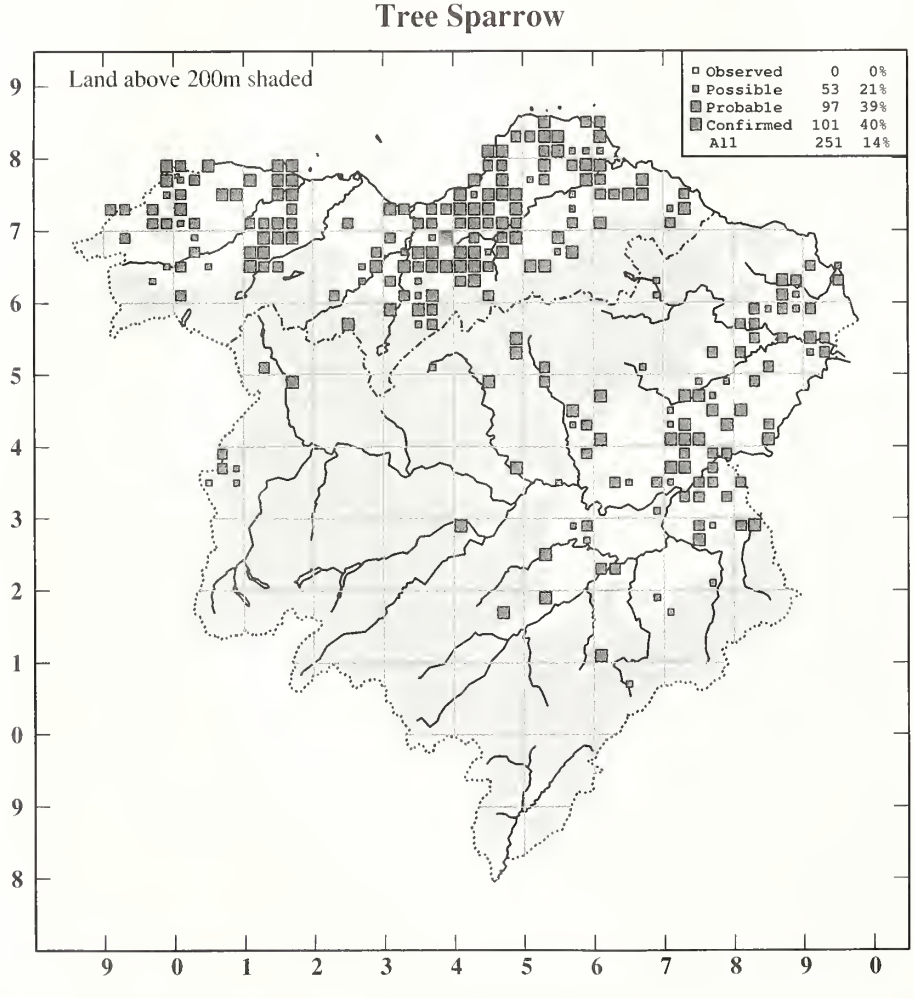
The South East Scotland breeding bird atlas

The recent publication of the first tetrad breeding bird atlas ever published in Scotland by the Lothian and Borders branches of the SOC marks the latest stage in the effort by the organising group that started in 1988. A visit to the pub after a Lothian Branch lecture resulted in a group forming that was to spend the next 7 years exploring literally every nook and cranny of South East Scotland. Although some of the personnel changed over that period of time, the huge amount of fieldwork, mostly thoroughly enjoyable, resulted in over 90,000 records being gathered from all 1,756 tetrads by around 250 fieldworkers over 7 seasons.

Enormous effort

Due to the good offices of Peter Vandome, the current SOC Treasurer, work started early on the enormous effort of handling and arranging the data in such a fashion as to generate good maps and develop correlations between the ranges of the birds and the distribution of the habitat in which they were found. The value of Peter's contribution cannot be overestimated and I would recommend that any group contemplating such a venture find someone like Peter from the very start. Failing that, great thought must be given to the way in which the data is to be dealt with right from the start of the fieldwork period.

Tree Sparrow *Steven Brown*



Categories

Different species were categorised in the records as showing evidence of possible, probable or confirmed breeding. In additon an observed category was used, when a species was using, but not breeding in, the area. In total 91,000 records were collected.

While areas close to Edinburgh were easily covered, the more remote parts of south Roxburgh were tackled by 'hitsquads', usually a carload of birders who spent dawn to dusk over a weekend surveying as many tetrads as possible. Overnight stays at local outdoor centres allowed nocturnal species to be included.

The great joy of atlasing is that all observations are of importance, even views of Feral Pigeons and Pheasants, although it must be said that the sight of the first Scottish breeding Nuthatch, the first breeding of Black-necked Grebe in the Borders or stumbling on a Goshawk nest are rather more exciting!

Fieldwork is just the beginning of a project like this and the information had to be processed as it came in. The first records were laboriously entered onto charts by

hand. Later, a volunteer created computer software which allowed us to produce maps and habitat analyses at a keystroke, an enormous saving of effort. This let work start on the book before the fieldwork was complete. Scottish Natural Heritage allowed us to scrutinise aerial photographs to gather habitat data for the analysis of habitat preferences for each species.

Data handling

The data handling and writing of the book took another 3 years, although the target originally was just 2 years. Things always slip and, while it would have been useful to spend longer making a more thorough analysis of the results, I have to admit that our efforts became concentrated on publishing the maps and their commentaries as soon as possible before the fieldwork period slipped into history. The result nevertheless marks an important benchmark in the ornithology of our local area, the first complete systematic survey of our breeding birds. The maps and associated data have established a baseline for bird distributions in South East Scotland that will be of great use not just to birders and conservationists in the 1990s but well into the next millennium. We just hope that we are around when the survey is repeated, in 2018 or whenever! It should stand as a considerable testimony to the efforts of the local SOC branches and their members.

The atlas contains a mass of fascinating information that can be used to directly inform bird conservation. Although Black Grouse and Yellowhammers live in very contrasting upland and lowland habitats, both species are suffering from population declines and contraction of their breeding ranges in Britain. Comparisons of the 1968-72 and 1988-91 BTO atlases show this to be true, but, with the national atlases it is impossible to highlight the local changes that may have produced these losses. The tetrad atlas allows us a snapshot of where things stood between 1980-94. Previously, we have relied on anecdotal evidence to tell us about population declines and expansions but, at last, we will know precisely where a bird's distribution has changed, and thus may get a more accurate idea of why changes have occurred.

Questions

Having completed the *Atlas* we can now use it as a tool in helping to organise local survey work to answer several questions that have been raised in the species texts and in the analytical section of the book. The use of the book as a benchmark by which to measure avifaunal changes seems the most obvious method of using the data and such a scheme will occur in the 1998 breeding season in Lothian and Borders with a survey of Tree Sparrows, a species the BTO suggests may follow the Corn Bunting and Corncrake into oblivion in many areas of Scotland.

The *Atlas* has provided us with a map of the bird's distribution in south east Scotland, the Tree Sparrow being found in 251 tetrads. In 1998 we hope to survey a very ambitious 20% of these tetrads, 50 squares in all. Ten further squares adjacent to tetrads that held birds in the 1994-98 period will also be surveyed to allow us to record the unlikely event of an expansion of range since 1994. Of course we strongly suspect that we will record a decline. Whatever the result, the 20% sample will allow us to make a more definite and authoritative statement about the local decline of this inhabitant of arable farmland. The 1998 survey will also census the population within the 50 selected tetrads. This will generate data that should allow us to make a much better estimate of the numbers of Tree Sparrows in the area. The population estimate of 1300 pairs that we made in the *Atlas* was based on national population estimates of how many birds might be found in an average square kilometre of occupied habitat. This figure was then used to calculate the local population based on the 251 occupied tetrads that we found in our survey. While this resultant figure is the best estimate that could have been made, it emphasises the need for much more precise tetrad based fieldwork. The survey will also record some habitat details and these in turn might be useful in determining why some tetrads have lost Tree Sparrows while others have retained them.

Other atlases

With atlases nearing completion in Clyde, Ayrshire and Fife and work being contemplated in Orkney and other parts of Scotland, we stand on the threshold of a period when our knowledge of Scottish ornithology must increase by leaps and bounds and stand as a definitive statement on bird distribution in the 1990s. As most of the effort has been put in by SOC members, the Club has every right to be proud of the efforts of its members to fulfil the aims contained in the Club's Constitution! It was also a lot of fun!

Ray Murray

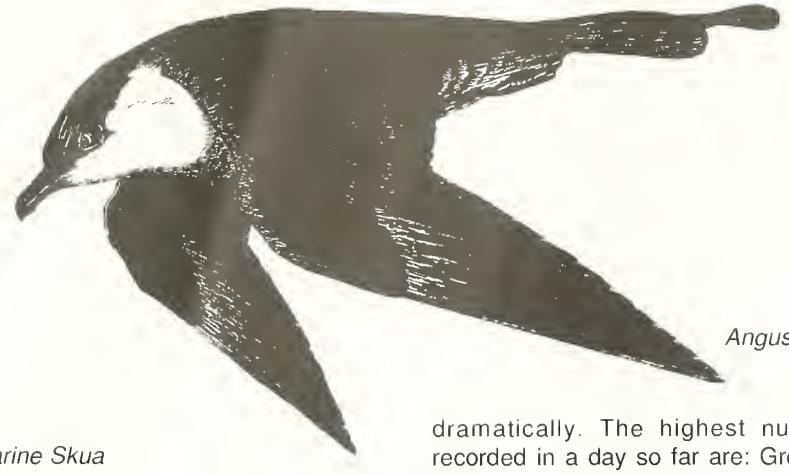
The Breeding Birds of South East Scotland is published by the Scottish Ornithologists' Club at £27 plus £3.40 p&p and can be ordered from ***Jim Mattocks, 9 East Fettes Avenue, Edinburgh EH4 1DN. Tel 0131 332 7104.***

Corn Bunting *David Mitchell*

UK coast still vulnerable

The RSPB says that some of the UK's finest coastal sites are still vulnerable to tanker disasters following delays by Government over the creation of Marine Environmental High Risk Areas (MEHRAs).

These were a key recommendation of the 1994 Donaldson report *Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas* which followed the Braer disaster of January 1993 when the tanker struck rocks off Shetland with a cargo of 85,000 tons of crude oil, and would route tankers away from dangerous areas of coast which are home to important colonies of seabirds. In the 5 years since the Braer hit the rocks in Shetland the Government still has not acted on this recommendation.



Angus Hogg

Pomarine Skua

Shetland Sandeels

The Shetland Fishermen's Association (SFA), RSPB Scotland and SNH have agreed a management package for the Shetland inshore Sandeel fishery. The management scheme should last for at least 3 years and have an annual review of catch limits which would be set at 7000 tonnes initially and be reviewed annually to take account of any marked changes in the Sandeel stocks. There should be a close season when no Sandeel fishing would be allowed between 1June and 31 July, a time when species such as Arctic Terns will be feeding young. Arctic Tern numbers declined dramatically during the 1980s; they still have not recovered completely although breeding success of other seabirds has improved. Following the closure of the Sandeel fishery between 1991-94 Sandeel stocks improved, but recruitment of young fish is still variable. This may be in part due to a change in ocean currents around Shetland.

Firth of Forth skua migration

The 3 smaller skuas are all transequatorial migrants, the majority usually passing north of the Scottish mainland and into the North Atlantic before continuing south. Some enter the North Sea and a proportion appear in the Firth of Forth. In some years, when weather conditions push more skuas off their normal track, the Forth experiences influxes of Long-tailed and/or Pomarine Skuas. The larger Great Skua migrates a shorter distance. A few of this species enter the Forth. In most years the numbers of each species is in the order Arctic, Pomarine, Great and Long-tailed. During influx years the numbers of Long-tailed and/or Pomarine Skuas increase dramatically. The highest numbers recorded in a day so far are: Great 71, Arctic 125, Long-tailed 217 and Pomarine 494.

Several locations along the Forth give good opportunities to watch skua passage. One of the best places is undoubtedly Hound Point, a mile and a half east of South Queensferry within Dalmeny Estate. Here skuas are forced close inshore due to the narrowing of the coastline. Skua watching here can be difficult because, not only do some birds fly low over the sea, but many migrating groups fly west at a considerable height to negotiate the bridges. Trying to observe skua migration is a lottery, with no 2 dates producing the same results. Some days are blank, whereas others can be very productive with tens or even hundreds of birds observed. Late afternoon and early evening are often favourable, especially when winds are from a direction between north westerly to south easterly. In general, the best months for each species are as follows: Arctic: August to mid October; Long-tailed: August and September; Pomarine: late August to early November; and Great: September and October.

Mervyn Griffin

Whale deaths and the military?

Military testing of underwater sonar systems may be responsible for the rise in the number of whale strandings. This might help explain the increase of disorientated whales in the North Sea in recent years, including 'Moby' the Sperm Whale that beached and died last March in the Firth of Forth after several well publicised but unsuccessful attempts to encourge him out to sea.

Greek research, published in the magazine *Nature,* argues that the testing of LFAS - a particularly loud system that emits sounds close to the sensitive navigation frequency of some whales - coincided with a mass stranding in the Greek Ionian Sea since 1981. Three other cases have occurred near the Canary Islands during military manoeuvres according to Mark Simmonds of the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society.

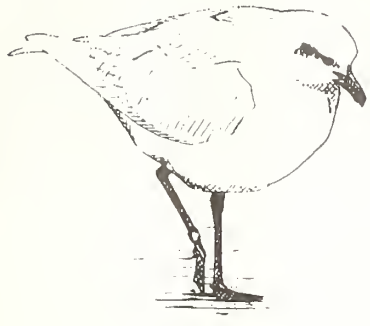
There is a large submarine testing ground off the West Coast of Scotland. Large number of Sperm Whales have come into the North Sea in the last 3 winters. These whales may have been deflected off their natural migration route by something because they should be going round the west side of the British Isles. At the time 'Moby' came ashore, Greenpeace claimed seismic testing and drilling by oil companies was responsible for the death of the mammal by disorientating its navigation system. The oil industry has vigorously rejected these claims.

A spokesman for the Ministry of Defence at Faslane confirmed to the press that a British Underwater Test and Evaluation Centre was sited of the Kyle of Lochalsh but dismissed any suggestion that sonar testing was strong enough to interfere while whales' navigation systems. The marketing manager for Rosyth Dockyard said to the media that it was 'fairly unlikely' that naval activity on the east coast had played a part, and that investigations at the time had failed to indicate any unusual under water activity.

Whale enthusiasts point out that cetaceans can panic if they hear a noise they have never heard before that is very loud in the water. They say human divers experiencing even a fraction of the sonar volume used in LFAS can become dizzy and disorientated.

Where do our Mediterranean Gulls come from?

Recent Lothian, Ayrshire and Fife Bird Reports show clearly that the Mediterranean Gull is increasing in Scotland. Birds are recorded in every month of the year and over the last 2 decades there have been at least 3 instances of adults present in inland Black-headed Gull colonies. In England this species is increasing, breeding as far north as Lancashire.



Mediterranean Gull Ayrshire Bird Report

On 12 August 1997 a juvenile Mediterranean Gull was discovered at Leven, Fife. Over the next few weeks it moulted into first winter plumage. Where did it come from? England or Holland would seem to be the best bets although there was speculation that birds may have bred locally. The story took a further twist, however, when on 6 December 1997 another first winter Mediterranean Gull was found at Leven. This bird had red colour rings and had been ringed on 18 June 1997 in Hungary. The Hungarians were very pleased to hear of the Fife bird as it added to their other Western European records, including one each from Norway and Ireland. The Mediterranean Gull has recently become a regular breeding species in Hungary with about 150 pairs in 1996. Ringing studies have shown that the Hungarian population migrates to the Atlantic coast along the Danube and Rhine rivers. Young birds leave in the first half of July and pass through Switzerland by mid July. It would seem that they reach the North Sea by the second half of July. Therefore it is possible that a juvenile in the Firth of Forth in mid August could have come from Hungary. Any observers finding Mediterranean Gulls of any age should check for colour rings and held add to our knowledge of the origins of birds occurring in Scotland.

Ken Shaw

Rum reduction

Reducing the number of Red Deer is recognised as crucial if natural regeneration of plants and trees is to occur in the uplands of Scotland. Several areas on the mainland, such as the RSPB's Abernethy Reserve, have already benefited from much heavier culling than is normally carried out by traditional shooting estates. Now the well studied Red Deer on Rum are to have their numbers radically reduced. SNH plan to kill up to 1000 of the 1300 deer. This will allow the fences erected to protect the many young trees planted on the island to be removed. Behavioural studies on the deer will continue over the culling period.

Ducks blamed for closure of shellfish farm

According to press reports 5 people have lost their jobs and others will lose part of their livelihood due to the closure of a £1 million mussel farm in Wester Ross. The business, which was given a £100,000 Highlands and Islands Enterprise grant, had to close because Eiders "picked off the profits". The Eider population on Loch Kishorn is said to have increased to 600 after the arrival of 6 rafts, costing £50,000 each, which were supposed to yield a harvest of 50 tonnes of mussels a year.

A spokesman for Kishorn Shellfish said "We have lost the best part of £1 million due to the ducks. We tried everything - gas guns and other guns firing blank cartridges and tapes of distress calls. The only way that the birds could be controlled was by having a motor boat patrolling the sea near our rafts, but the cost was far too high."

Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Fair

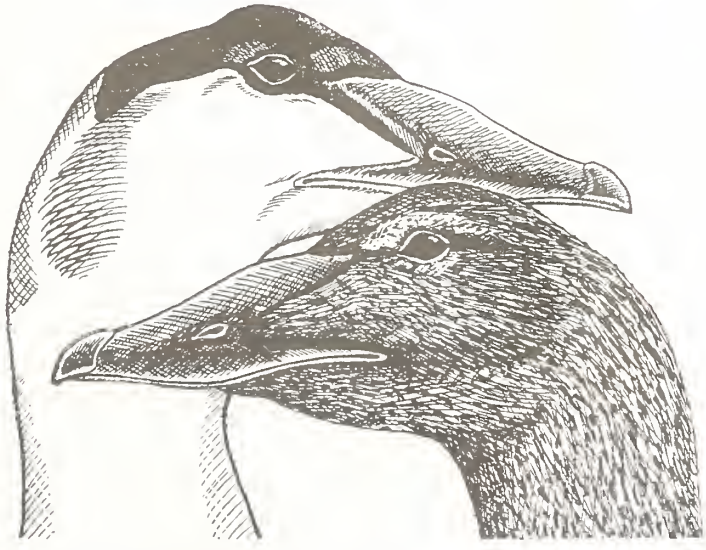
This is the fourth year of the Scottish Wildlife & Countryside Fair and it has gone from strength to strength. This year the Fair will again take place at the RSPB Vane Farm Nature Reserve over the weekend 5-6 September 1998. Following last year's successful event, when over 7,000 people attended, 1998 promises to be even bigger and better.

The Fair, which is organised jointly by a partnership of Scotland's leading conservation organisations, offers a full weekend of activities for all the family including retail and crafts stalls, lectures, workshops, demonstrations, a fashion show, full catering and a wide range of optical goods on sale from top suppliers. There are many games, competitions and activites especially for children and an opportunity to take part in guided tours round the beautiful RSPB Vane Farm Nature Reserve.

The SOC will again be taking part, and will endeavour to win back the coveted quiz trophy which we lost to Fife Bird Club in 1997.

Any offers of help to man - or woman - our stand during the weekend will be most welcome. Please contact **Sylvia** at the **SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT Tel 0131 556 6042** if you are able to help.

We look forward to seeing you there!



Eiders *David Mitchell*

Spring conference at St Andrews

Driving to St Andrews, straight into the sun, I was prompted to consider the weather conditions at SOC Conferences. Frequently we end up in a dark lecture theatre on a beautiful sunny day and I can't help thinking there's a correlation. There must be a research project for Norman Elkins in this. I think we should be told!

The first speaker was Rob Fuller of the BTO. That habitat changes are responsible for the decline of many bird species is well known and Rob told us how bad things are in southern England. Some species, such as Corn Bunting and Tree Sparrow, now have their remaining strongholds in eastern Scotland, although declines are already becoming evident here as well.

Nesting Shags *Jim Young*

Tony Wilson, from Fife Ranger Service, gave us an interesting insight into the theory and practice of gravel pit restoration for wildlife. Nearby Birnie Loch has won national awards for restoration, producing some very interesting wildlife records.

Mike Harris presented results from 25 years of seabird research on the Isle of May. Shags have variable first egg dates and breeding success, the first clutches in 1998 were already laid by 7 March, over a week earlier than the record set in 1997. Statistics show that early laying leads to better breeding success so this should be a bumper year. The breeding failure of 1993 was just that; all the adults were present, they just didn't breed that year. Unfortunately the wreck of Shags in the following winter, caused by bad weather, killed off many of the adults so the following breeding season was disastrous and the population is still recovering. Incidentally, did you know that Shags suffer from senility? There must be a joke in there somewhere! A last thought from Mike: most Guillemots live in slums, with densities of around 40 pairs per square metre!

Andy Musgrove spoke on the BTO low tide estuarine shorebird counts, which take place over a 5 year cycle. Different species, with different feeding requirements, concentrate in different areas or even different estuaries. For example, Bar-tailed Godwits like Broughty Ferry on the Tay, whereas I now know that I live near the most important area for Turnstones in eastern Scotland, Cockenzie on the Forth. The fact that we have recently noted a decline in Turnstones locally is thus of even greater concern than we thought. Future developments include the use of Geographical Information Systems, mapping and all day counts.

After lunch, Alan Lauder described work on Pink-footed Geese. The whole Iceland/ Greenland population passes through eastern Scotland each year. They have been variously marked with Darvic rings, which can be read through a scope at 250m, or neck collars, which extend the range to 500m; 84% of collared birds are resighted and individual birds can thus be studied - like FV which spent virtually all its time over 3 winters using the same 5 fields at Vane Farm. This strong site fidelity is apparently typical.

A complete change in scale followed, as Jim Cobb described ringing Willow Warblers, whose rings could probably just be read at 250mm! Jim has ringed at the same Constant Effort Site at Kippo every week for 11 years - there's dedication for you! A large database now enables analysis. The wood is an "island site" with no other woods nearby and there is strong site fidelity. Jim's plans for the next decade? To finish Willow Warblers and do "all the other species"!

Bruce Lynch revealed that the Tay reedbeds are the largest single stretch of reeds in Britain. Regularly harvested, they nevertheless shelter some wonderful birds and the Tay Ringing Group has been studying them for years. Species as Sand Martin and Sedge Warbler can be tape lured and large numbers have been ringed. Water Rails have been fitted with radio tags so that they can be tracked around the reedbeds and territories can be mapped. Winter highlights include an "azure haze" of Blue Tits as well as Kingfisher and Snipe. Recently arrived species in the reedbeds include Marsh Harrier and Bearded Tit making the site very important. The conservation status is at present patchy and uncertain and it is important that birders do not upset landowners.

Ken Shaw started with the revelation that "my life has been dominated by strong women", accompanied by a slide of the Misses Baxter and Rintoul! They, of course, were great bird recorders and the need for the recording of bird sightings is still as strong as in their day. Rare birds can become common and common birds can become rare so we need to record these trends so conservation strategies can be evolved. Ken's last 2 slides were of quotes:
"I cannot understand why every gentleman does not become an ornithologist" - Charles Darwin.
"Couldn't agree more, Charles" - Ken Shaw.
Ian Darling wound up the Conference with another: "Thanks very much Ken, it's nice to know a personal friend of Charles Darwin"!

All in all, we had an excellent day and learned a lot. Our thanks are due to the Fife Branch and St Andrews University for a very well organised Conference. Book me in for the next one!

Paul Speak

Murphy's wildlife

The heavens opened as Ayr Branch members arrived at the Cairnryan ferry terminal for the early evening crossing to Larne; an inauspicious start to an excellent weekend's birding with Chris Murphy - known by many as The Man who Found the Lendalfoot Harlequins. The Jetliner sliced through the waves of the North Channel at almost 40 knots. Soon we were speeding along Belfast's peripheral motorway to the annual pre Christmas quiz night of the Northern Ireland Bird Club, held in an upstairs room of a pub in Holywood. We were made very welcome and did our best to return the correct answers, which some of the group actually managed; others would have received a booby prize had there been one!

Saturday, 22 November dawned with a watery sun and a few dark looking clouds but, after a hearty breakfast, we soon found ourselves watching the tide race into Strangford Lough. Our plan was to explore this locality where migrant birds, Otters and seals have helped turn an area of great scenic beauty into Northern Ireland's first Marine Nature Reserve. On our first foray we were accompanied by 2 young ladies from the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, who boldly attempted to capture a group of birdwatchers to the Province on film. We saw many waders and seabirds and, where Strangford Lough meets the Irish Sea, we were treated to 2 sightings of Otter, one so close and so clear we shall never forget the experience.

As the day went on we saw a good variety of wader and waterfowl, many species being similar to those found in Scotland such as Velvet Scoter. However, 2000+ Brent Geese, for which the area is justifiably famous, were different. As we neared Newtownards, the sinking sun was creating vivid and dramatic colours and patterns in the sky with hues from the palest blue to deep vermilion. This was a striking background for the large flocks of roosting waders, including vast numbers of Golden Plover, with the great hill of Scrabo and its mighty tower standing sentinel over the scene.

Our final excusion took us up the narrow road to Scrabo and its country park, where we enjoyed a panoramic view of Strangford Lough in the last rays of the evening sun. A walk over to the nearby cliffs rewarded us with a view of a male Peregrine, lit by the last gold rays and sharply etched against the dark cliff.

Brent Goose *Ayrshire Bird Report*

Next day was a bright and breezy morning, although the same could not be said for some of us at breakfast. At Castleward Bay we looked for Kingfisher, but were rewarded with Gadwall and Greenshank instead. The road took us to the National Nature Reserve of the Quoile Pondage, an unusual name for an area which has been changed by the construction of an antiflood barrage. From the Pondage we made our way through to the fishing village of Ardglass where lunch was purchased at the local Spar store. We used the minibus as a picnic area and Chris had arranged for an Iceland Gull to provide the floor (or sky) show while we munched sandwiches and pies. Backup was provided by Common and Grey Seals with a final encore from the Iceland Gull.

More highlights followed with Little Auk at St John's Point and 2 Kingfishers at Dundrum. The SOC Ayrshire Branch weekend once again proved to be a big success with a total bird count of 107. We were now heading towards Belfast for fish and chips and a goodbye drink with Chris Murphy in the Victorian splendour of the Crown Inn, a fitting finale to this pre Christmas break. As if to point us in the direction of our next outing we met 2 journalists from a German newspaper and were able to tell them that our next holiday would go to the Rhine and the Bodensee.

Thanks to Andrew Stevenson and Bill McKechnie for their joint organisation of this excellent trip. Anyone interested in trying out a similar excursion should contact Chris Murphy at **Murphy's Wildlife Tours, 12 Belvoir Close, Belvoir Park, Belfast BT8 4PL. Telephone 01232 693232.** We can thoroughly recommend it.

Tony Scott

Kingfisher *Brian Turner*

REVIEWS

Handbook of the Birds of the World. Vol 4 Sandgrouse to Cuckoos *edited by J del Hoyo, A Elliott and J Sargatal. 1998. £110. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona.*

Advances in knowledge and more sophisticated publishing methods now bring us the fourth volume of *HBW*. Volume 4, covering sandgrouse, pigeons, doves, cockatoos, parrots, turacos and cuckoos has now been published in all its 3 kg glory. Reviewing such a volume in a Scottish context is not easy, as only 11 of the 827 species described and illustrated in the book appear on the Scottish List – and 5 of these are vagrants. An increasing number of SOC members are travelling the globe in search of birds and many will see this volume as an essential reference, rather than a means of identifying that escaped parrot seen in the garden! As in previous volumes, there are general texts and photos at the head of each Family section, followed by text, maps and drawings of every species in that Family. All very well, but inevitably the species texts are brief and will not tell you all you want to know about each species. This book does not attempt to replace detailed, local handbooks and field guides – but then you probably can't afford to own all of those! The general texts, written by experts, are packed with relevant facts and truly superb photographs.

Ian Andrews

Pocket Guide to the Birds of Britain and North West Europe *by Chris Kightley, Steve Madge & Dave Nurney in association with the BTO. 1998. Pica Press. 299pp. £11.95 Softback. ISBN 1-873403-49-6*

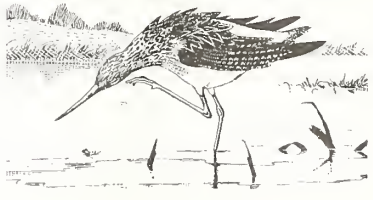
The appearance of yet another field guide shows the popularity of the subject but you still wonder when there will be one too many. However, first impressions of this new BTO backed arrival are good. The book is chunky and certainly portable covering 380 species up to and including scarce migrants with birds depicted in varying plumages and attitudes plus distribution maps alongside. The text for each species is conveniently and concisely sectionalised to make reference easy. The pictures are clear and generally good but there are a number where the colour is less than true such as Ringed Plover, Dunlin (breeding plumage), Subalpine Warbler and Mandarin. Some may find it a disadvantage that southern Europe is omitted, an area much visited these days, but overall the guide compares favourably with others in the same price range.

Keith Macgregor

A Guide to the Nests, Eggs, and Nestlings of North American Birds *Second Edition. Paul J Baicich & Colin J O Harrison. 1997. Academic Press, London £24.95. ISBN 0-12-072831-1*

This good quality paperback provides a thorough species by species guide to the breeding biology of the birds of North America from the Arctic to the southern boundary of the United States. Some 669 breeding species are described, giving information on habitats, nest sites, nest construction, breeding season, eggs, incubation and nesting and nestling period for each species. There are over 100 black and white drawings of nests and nestlings, 16 colour plates of a range of young, 48 colour plates showing eggs of 597 species and identification keys for nests, eggs and nestlings.

Joan Wilcox



Greenshank *David Mitchell*

The Birds of Sutherland *by Alan Vittery. 1997. Colin Baxter Photography Ltd. 160pp. £9.95. Softback. ISBN 1-900455 18 8.*

Alan Vittery's book provides a comprehensive picture of the varied bird life to be found in Sutherland especially revealing how the 'softer' and more watched south east attracts so many species compared with the truly wild country of the west containing many of the Highland specialities. Population changes and passage movements are well documented and the tantalising possibilities of new breeding records provide the observer with ample incentive to visit the area armed with this book as an informative reference and guide.

Keith Macgregor

Raptors in Human Landscapes: Adaptations to Built and Cultivated Environments *by D M Bird, D E Varland and J J Negro. 1996. Academic Press. 396pp. Hardback £45. ISBN 0-12-100130-X.*

This book contains a series of papers presented at a symposium in North Carolina in November 1993. Increasing populations and more widespread development are bringing many raptors in close contact with modern landscapes. The papers document the findings of research into the impacts on a range of raptor species in a dozen countries worldwide. This includes impacts in cultivated, industrial and urban landscapes and also impacts on a countrywide scale, as well as the provision and success of artificial nesting sites.

The majority of the papers provide evidence of successful co-existence between humans and raptors, including the Peregrine in North America, where urban nesting is considered to be a significant factor in the recovery of some populations. Other examples include the increased nesting and productivity of Ospreys on structures especially pylons, and the adaptation of upland raptors in Britain (except Hen Harrier and Golden Eagle) to spruce forests.

The findings are not all positive in all human altered landscapes. In recording the positive messages, the book also notes that such successes should not be seen as an opportunity to give up the fight for natural habitat. It highlights the importance of understanding whether raptors are capable of adaptation, an issue which can be important in assessing their conservation status. Finally it stresses the need for those involved in raptor conservation and economics, to maintain a dialogue.

Andrew Coates

Shrikes: A Guide to the Shrikes of the World *by Norbert Lefranc. Illustrated by Tim Worfolk. 1997. Pica Press. 192pp. £25. ISBN 1 874303 47 X*

This book claims to be "primarily an identification guide and the first of its kind giving detailed descriptions of species and some of the races considered to be valid and recognisable in the field". Not withstanding the future microscope of practical use, this claim may well prove to be a reasonable one.

Having given a taxonomic review, the book settles for the 'true shrikes' and therefore deals with 31 species in detail, with reference to and practical comment on races. The systematic section is preceded by introductory chapters on the biology and ecology of shrikes based on fully referenced published work. However, this is designed to be a book for the field. There are 16 colour plates showing the

ostensible species in different age, sex and plumage states. There are clear cross-references to the text sections, which contain plumage details, biometrics, distribution and status as well as geographical variation. The distribution maps are of good size and are exceptionally clear and informative. They show major river systems and political boundaries that will considerably assist the travelling birder. The illustrations are certainly very attractive though their field value remains to be seen, and they lack the support of detailed behavioural notes, which so often assist in difficult identification scenarios.

The serious birder who has experienced the frustration of generalist field guides and feels the need to have state of the art information at their fingertips will appreciate this book.

Clive Walton

History Working Group

Since the last note on our activities appeared in *SBN 46*, the group has increased in number to 5. Chris Mylne has joined us to be responsible for visual material (stills, film, etc). Please contact him (tel 01506 842355) if you can help us with this type of material.

The cassette tape collection is off to a good start, with several now fully transcribed and accessioned. In organising our sound archives we benefited from a visit to Rhona Talbot at the School of Scottish Studies, who gave us useful advice. Besides interviews conducted by John Arnott, and Maury Meiklejohn's 1968 talk (tape and transcript kindly donated by W A J Cunningham and Helen Halliday respectively), we also have an interview with George Waterston acquired by John Ballantyne from the Shetland Archives. To everyone who has been helping us in these various ways we are most grateful.

Although there was some disappointment at the Conference in November, when a late Dinner meant postponing the planned 'MFMM event', we have been promised a more suitable slot for it at the next conference.

There has been some discussion of the possibility of producing a book on the history of Scottish ornithology. Whether or not this gets off the ground in the near future, we have made a start at collecting material that would be useful for such a project, and are anxious to acquire more.

Geoffrey Harper

LETTERSTOTHE EDITOR

32 Learmonth Place
St Andrews
Fife KY16 8XF
27th March 1998

The Editors
SBN
21 Regent Terrace
Edinburgh EH7 5BT

Dear Editors,

I have always been puzzled by the injunction in the 'Advice to contributors' in *Scottish Birds* that they should "Avoid hyphens except where essential eg in bird names". Why on earth should one deprive oneself of a very useful punctuation mark, the omission of which can lead at best to ungainly sentences and at worst to ambiguity? There is, after all, a world of difference between a man-eating Tiger and a man eating Tiger, or between a hen coop and a High Street Co-op!

There was a good example in the latest issue of *Scottish Birds* (Spring 1998). I looked forward to reading the article on 'The status of Storm Petrels on Mousa, Shetland', as the Fife Branch had a memorable trip to Mousa last June in the course of our Shetland week-end; sure enough, I learnt a lot from the article that I did not know at the time of our visit. For instance, we did not see a single submarine when we were there, yet the authors refer several times to a sub colony on Mousa. Could it be that they really meant a sub-colony but the Editors would not allow them to use a hyphen?

Yours sincerely

Donald Stewart

PS Please print this letter with the hyphens in the correct place!

Indeed the Editor would not allow hyphens - nor will Donald's well written and amusing letter deflect him from his purpose. Punctuation has, despite claims by traditionalists, never had one set of rules; perhaps it should? However, styles and even spelling do change, generally towards simpler forms. Although this is regularly criticised as evidence of declining standards it is difficult to see why our language should be immune from change when so many other aspects of life have to adapt to changing circumstances.

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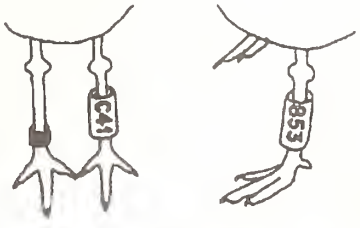
REQUESTS

Darvic ringed Oystercatchers

Aberdeen is notable for a large population of Oystercatchers nesting on flat roofs in the city. This roof nesting habit was first noted in the early 1970s when there were about 30 breeding pairs. This has increased to about 250 pairs. Six adults and over 100 chicks were ringed in 1997 with a yellow or white darvic ring on the left leg bearing a unique combination of a letter and 2 digits (see diagram). Although primarily aimed at determining the site faithfulness of roof reared birds returning to breed, we are also keen to gather information on post fledging dispersal. Ringing indicates that Oystercatchers from north east Scotland move mainly south and west in winter towards Morecambe Bay and into Ireland while others spend the winter on estuaries along the east and south coasts of Britain. The rings are fairly unobtrusive and will probably require a telescope to read so any sightings will be gratefully welcome and acknowledged (promptly!) with a full history. Please contact either **Alistair Duncan, 12 Cairncry Avenue, Aberdeen AB16 5DS** or **Raymond Duncan, 86 Broadford Drive, Bridge of Don, Aberdeen AB23 8PP.**



Tagged Grey Seal pups

The Sea Mammal Research Unit is carrying out a study, now in its second year, into the survival of Grey Seal pups from the Isle of May in the Firth of Forth.

Approximately half of the 1300 pups born at the island each year will die before their first birthday. We don't know why some pups die and others survive but we suspect that it is related to how big they are when they leave the island.

To see if this is the case we weighed 215 Grey Seal pups and glued yellow and green tags to their heads. The tags will fall off when the animals moult next season. The 'hats' are individually numbered and coded according to pup weight. The codes, either 2 numbers, a number and a letter or 2 letters, are stamped on the front and sides of the hats and will be visible when the animals are hauled out on land or are swimming near the shore. We would very much like to know, if you see a pup wearing a 'hat', when and where you saw it and what its colour and code were.

There is a reward for any 'hats' we get back from pups that have died, so look out for dead seals on the beach or 'hats' on the shore that have fallen off. The telephone number is **01334 462630** and is also printed on the 'hat' should you find one.

Ailsa Hall, Sea Mammal Research Unit, University of St Andrews, Bute Medical Buildings, Queens Terrace, St Andrews, Fife KY16 9TS. Fax 01334 462632 or e_mail a.hall@smru.ac.uk

Colour ringed Shags

For many years Shags breeding on the Isle of May in the Firth of Forth have been colour ringed with yellow rings engraved with 2 letters. In 1997 as many as possible of the young were marked with white rings engraved with 3 letters. In addition, adults of known age are marked with similar red rings. This is a joint project between the Isle of May Bird Observatory, the University of Glasgow and ITE. Although adult Shags usually winter within 150 km of the colony, juveniles disperse. We would welcome sightings of any colour ringed Shag and will supply details of the individuals involved. Please report to: **Mike Harris, Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, Hill of Brathens, Banchory, Kincardineshire, AB31 4BY. Phone 01330-823434 Fax 01330-823303 Email m.p.harris@ite.ac.uk.**

SOC NOTICES

200 Club

Winners in the first quarter of 1998 were:

January - 1st £30 – M C Lawrie, Troon; 2nd £20 – D Boomer, Cheshire; 3rd £10 – M H Gibson, Galashiels
February - 1st £50 – A D Poyser, Staffordshire; 2nd £30 – A G S Bryson, Edinburgh; 3rd £20 – F D Hamilton, Longniddry; 4th £10 – A J Sprott, Bonnyrigg
March - 1st £30 – A D K Ramsay, Tain; 2nd £25 – D F Donnelly, Hamilton; 3rd £20 – M Holling, Stow; 4th £10 – S E Horsburgh, Peebles

All members who rejoined at the start of the 200 Club's tenth year, on 1 June, are very warmly thanked; the SOC is very grateful for your continued support. If you are not already a 200 Club member and are over 18, you can still join for the year and will be very welcome. Please send me a cheque for £12 payable to "SOC 200 Club", or write and ask me for a Banker's Order form. You will be entered for the next draw and your cheque will be acknowledged.

Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL (Tel 01896 822176).

Branch meetings

Dates for branch meetings in September are as follows:

Sept 9 - Borders; Sept 10 - Tayside; Sept 15 - Highland, Lothian and West Galloway; Sept16 - Ayrshire, Caithness, Dumfries and Fife; Sept 17 - Orkney and Stewartry, Sept 21 - Grampian; Sept 24 - Stirling.

Annual Conference

The 1998 Annual Conference will be at the Balavil Sport Hotel, Newtonmore over the weekend 30th October - 1st November 1998. Further details will be sent with the September mailing.

Nominations for Council

Nominations for 2 new Council members are required to replace Ian Bainbridge and Mick Marquiss. Nominations should be made in writing with a proposer and seconder and should be sent to **The Secretary, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT no later than 31 July 1998.**

Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club. It is published 4 times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices need to be sent to the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace no later than 5 weeks before publication. The magazine acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and to disseminate information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. The views expressed in articles in *Scottish Bird News* are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication. The SOC also publishes the journal *Scottish Birds* which publishes original papers and notes on Scottish ornithology and the *Scottish Bird Report*. For details of these publications and membership contact the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

Discussion Group 1998

The South East Scotland Discussion Group meets monthly in the Library at 21 Regent Terrace to talk about fieldwork, surveys and local conservation issues and eat cakes. All members are welcome to attend especially good home bakers. Meetings start at 1930. The dates for 1998 are: September 2; October 7; November 4; and December 2. We look forward to seeing many new faces this year as well as sampling more cakes.

Thanks to

Once again, many thanks are due to the willing volunteers who came in to Regent Terrace to assist in sending out the March mailing. They were: Chris and Angus Smith, Rosemary Davidson, Sue Goode, Joan Wilcox, Bob and Betty Smith, Noreen Stabler and Margaret Abel.

Rarity descriptions

It would be helpful if all observers of rarities could send in the descriptions preferably to local recorders as soon as possible after the sighting. It will speed up the decision making process if notes on all major spring rarities are submitted by mid July at the latest. **Please do not wait until the end of the year**. Thank you.

M J Rogers, Secretary BBRC, 2 Churchtown Cottages, Towednack, St Ives, Cornwall TR26 3AZ

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THE SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Scottish Bird News

SEPTEMBER 1998 No. 51
ISSN 0308-5104

SCOTTISH
OCT 01 1998
LIBRARIES

Edited by Stan da Prato
Assisted by Pamela Black,
Sylvia Laing and Joan Wilcox

The future of farming

British farmers are under pressure from a whole range of problems from BSE to the strength of the pound. In the long term their biggest worry is probably the future of the European Common Agricultural Policy. This currently costs each European citizen over £100 per year in tax and increased food prices. Some changes to the CAP have already taken place and others are inevitable as East European countries join. This is bound to mean less production subsidies coming to Britain. As agriculture is still the principal land use in the countryside this is bound to have an effect on wildlife.

Change in direction

Given that only 3% of CAP spending goes on environmental schemes there is a case for CAP reform changing the emphasis of subsidies from production to schemes that benefit rural employment. Such schemes tend to involve low intensity and/or traditional farming methods which are also more sympathetic to wildlife. Indeed it is surprising that farmers' organisations do not seem to see the potential for a joint strategy with conservationists here. Presumably the answer lies in farmers desire to be independent and often a reluctance to accept that in many areas farming will only have a future if it works along with other sources of income such as tourism and conservation. Many farmers simply want to be able to keep growing cereals or raising livestock even in areas - and this applies to much of Scotland - where economic reality points in other directions.

Negative effects

Few farmers like to admit that it is their industry that has had such a negative effect on wildlife, not due to deliberate persecution, but because high intensity agriculture leaves so little food or habitat for wildlife. Farming operations are largely exempt from planning regulations. Most farmers and landowners argue strongly that they should have the freedom to manage their land with no outside interference 'We are the natural guardians of the countryside' is a typical quote.

Just how reliable the voluntary principle is in practice can be gauged from events earlier this year on land in the east of Midlothian. Here approximately 5ha of permanent pasture with banks of dense scrub had been tolerated for years by a farmer who rather enjoyed the songbirds that lived in it. The ground is immediately to the east of the Hadfast Valley SWT reserve which consists of ungrazed scrub and is rich in songbirds. Although a reserve agreement has only recently been reached the proposed reserve was given SSSI status by the then NCC some years ago thus giving that area some protection. Both scrub areas make up a CBC plot which has now been censused for over 20 years.

Lesser Whitethroat at a nest in Midlothian *Stan da Prato*

When the owner of the eastern unprotected area died the land was bought by an East Lothian farmer who used heavy machinery to tear up and burn most of the scrub. This took place in May when the CBC was advanced enough to allow the total number of territories destroyed to be calculated. They were:
4 Blackbird, 1 Song Thrush, 5 Robin, 7 Dunnock, 2 Wren, 1 Blackcap, 4 Willow Warbler, 1 Lesser Whitethroat, 2 Blue Tit, 4 Chaffinch, 3 Linnet, 2 Yellowhammer. Additionally another 1 Yellowhammer and 2 Chaffinch territories were severely reduced though the birds tried to hold on in what was left as hedges while one each territory of Long-tailed Tit, Bullfinch, Redpoll and Greenfinch have been partly affected.

Issues

Several issues are raised by this action. The ground is an SWT listed wildlife site and the local planning authority should have known this. It seems that the farmer made no attempt to contact interested parties when he decided to destroy the scrub. So much for the voluntary principle which many land owning interests tell us is adequate to protect wildlife habitats. Given recent publicity about the adjacent reserve one wonders whether the new owner deliberately destroyed the scrub in case it became an SSSI or an extension to the reserve.

Stan da Prato

A further response to Langholm

The March issue of *SBN* contained the views of the RSPB and some other bodies about the Joint Raptor Study, including the importance of Heather loss and deterioration. Stress was put on overgrazing by sheep and the need to alter sheep subsidies. Certainly, high sheep density can cause Heather loss, but the issue is complex. Simplistic comments blaming sheep can be incorrect and may lead to invalid decisions on policies.

On the basis of aerial photographs taken in 1948 and 1988, the Joint Raptor Study Report estimated a 48% Heather loss on Langholm moor and stated that this was consistent with the effects of heavy grazing by sheep. However, the report gave no data on sheep numbers. At the Game Conservancy Trust's Inverness conference, director general Dr Dick Potts said "a high profile had been given to claims last November that sheep were the main threat to grouse at Langholm. But with over 10,000 acres of Heather moorland, and 1,500 ewes, there was no possibility of the land being overstocked" (*Press & Journal*. 27 March). His comment, like the RSPB's in the opposite direction, is oversimplified. Such a low stocking rate might lead to Heather loss, as noted in my fourth point below.

First, high densities of Red Deer, Rabbits, and subsidised cattle can also cause Heather loss and deterioration, with or without sheep. Second, many who blame sheep for Heather loss do not grasp that Heather browsing by high stocks in winter, especially late winter, is damaging, whereas summer browsing by quite big stocks can be beneficial. Third, good shepherding and other efficient sheep management can greatly increase Heather cover and reduce bracken and other competing species, without any need for fewer sheep. This can occur even with 5-10% more hill sheep, as Peter Straker-Smith found in a striking case history at Priestlaw in the Lammermuirs, while also increasing his grouse bags there.

Fourth, and above all, underburning and other aspects of inadequate muirburn can lead to Heather loss and deterioration where there are few sheep, cattle, deer and Rabbits, or even none. This is because if Heather is left too old before it is burned, regeneration of young Heather is very slow and incomplete, irrespective of whether browsing mammals are present or not. As a result, grass, Bracken and other plants out compete the Heather and dominate the sward. This is exacerbated if the fire is too cool, leaving a thick mat of unburnt litter, or too hot, burning into the soil.

If any browsing mammals are present, the effects of inadequate muirburn are exacerbated where burnt patches in old Heather are few and small. Then, even low numbers of browsing mammals concentrate at high density on these small patches and eat most or all of the little young Heather that is regenerating. This leads to a more rapid spread of other plant species at the expense of Heather.

Hence the burning of few small fires in old Heather in such conditions greatly speeds up the loss of Heather. Conversely, if muirburn is adequate on that same moor, it can result in a high proportion of young Heather, no rank old degenerate Heather, many burnt patches well dispersed over all parts of the moor, and browsing mammals opening up any thick Heather swards to the benefit of grouse. If so, Heather can increase in nutritional value and in ground coverage at the expense of Bracken and grass, without any need for fewer sheep or deer.

Langholm moor is an example. In spring 1969 I spent much of a day counting grouse there with dogs. Burnt patches were few and small, regeneration of young Heather on the burnt patches was poor, and most Heather was old, mainly in the mature stage, but with much degenerate Heather. Old Heather suffers more than young Heather from winter browning, insect damage, and death or slow recovery following damage from any cause, and all these features were obvious in 1969. By 1988, when I next visited the moor, much Heather had vanished due to defoliation by insects, and had been replaced by tall rough grass, especially on burnt areas. It was no surprise to see a very low density of Red Grouse on the grassy tracts.

A point that has apparently escaped those who have made public comment on this study is that the estate's inadequate muirburn decades ago caused much of the later problem. The same defect applies to most Scottish grouse estates. Blaming sheep is an insufficient and misleading explanation for Heather loss and deterioration at Langholm and many other moors.

The Report presented some evidence that Hen Harriers take a bigger percentage of grouse when grouse density is low than when density is high. The evidence is not conclusive and more work is needed on this point. However, if one accepts it for the sake of argument, it follows that if the estate's muirburn had been adequate in earlier decades and had not led to Heather decline, grouse would be at higher density, with harriers having less proportionate impact on them.

Adam Watson

Hen Harrier at nest *William Paton*

The Game Conservancy Trust review of 1997

This annual report runs to 112 pages, all in full colour. Not only is it attractively produced it contains much to interest ornithologists and conservationists. Though the main aim of the Trust is to support and advise on game management it is encouraging to see it regards research as the 'backbone of (its) work': I could find no reference to 'townies' or 'bunny huggers' which is a pleasant change from many recent letters and articles in shooting and other publications while the introduction, when referring to the new Countryside Alliance, some of whose members do use such terms, noted that its voice will only be credible if it is backed up by research. The GCT - which has 27,000 members and enough sponsorship for it to employ 60 scientists and spend £1.4 million on research in 1997 - now often cooperates with conservation bodies; progress reported on in this issue includes joint work with BTO and RSPB.

Work of particular interest to ornithologists includes that on farming methods and songbirds, Corn Buntings, breeding waders as well as game birds. There is a useful discussion of Fox control and coastal nature reserves in Norfolk which is relevant to some Scottish coasts. However, the issue that stands out is undoubtedly that of birds of prey and Red Grouse. Following the publication of *Birds of Prey and Red Grouse* or the Langholm Study - see this and the 2 previous issues of *SBN*, the GCT proposed that the eggs of Hen Harriers should be removed from some nests and the clutches reared for release onto suitable habitat where harriers are currently absent. The basis for this proposal is that of a harrier 'quota' above which numbers would have to be controlled on grouse moors. GCT acknowledge that here they differ from bodies such as RSPB and ourselves; though there is now some agreement on the need for habitat management, redirection of agricultural subsidies and humane control of common predators such as Crows.

GCT accept that a solution must be acceptable to the general public and Government, and in the general public's mind there is no question that Hen Harriers are more important than grouse. After all Hen Harriers are a rare bird - grouse are not. They say 'we want more harriers and more grouse. We think this is possible provided that gamekeepers have the opportunity to manage both grouse and Hen Harriers.'

Linnet *Andrew Stevenson*

GCT reckon that if there was no grouse shooting in Britain the likely maximum number of Hen Harriers would be 1,600 pairs. They suggest this number as a conservation objective for Hen Harriers. This is roughly one pair of harriers for 6,500 acres of moor and they think that at this level damage to grouse stocks will be relatively low. However, at Langholm they say there are 13 times as many harriers which leads to their idea of a quota system where any harriers above a quota of one pair per 6,500 acres can be removed or moved on.

Although acknowledging pressure from many of their members for a reduction in protection to other raptors such as Sparrowhawk GCTstate that there is as yet no research evidence to justify this.

Stan da Prato

A copy of the GCT report for 1997 is in the Waterston Library. The address of the Trust is Fordingbridge, Hampshire SP6 1EF. For more information and comment on the Joint Raptor Study at Langholm members should see the articles in the previous 2 SBN's as well as the comment by Dr Adam Watson in this issue. We understand that this season supplementary feeding has been used on Langholm moor to try to reduce the effect of Hen Harriers on Red Grouse. This is the only legal method that offered any prospect of resolving the problem in the short term. Although we have heard that preliminary results have been 'encouraging' we have no firm details yet; when we do we shall bring them to member's notice.

Bird of prey persecution in Scotland in 1997

The fourth annual account of bird of prey persecution in Scotland has just been produced by the RSPB. A total of 209 reports alleging offences against wild birds were received by their Scottish Headquarters in 1997. Over half of these concerned bird of prey persecution; 66 allegations of direct deliberate persecution and 43 allegations of the illegal use of poisons. In 1996 there were 92 and 49 reports received in these categories. Once again, reports of illegal incidents were almost entirely restricted to parts of the country where game shooting is practised.

From the 66 persecution allegations an offence was confirmed in 19 cases and strongly suspected in a further 12. From the 43 poison reports the abuse of poison was confirmed in 23 cases. The confirmed poisoning incidents included 4 cases where Red Kites were killed. Less than 30 pairs of this species nest in Scotland. This situation is a matter of extreme concern.

Three prosecutions followed from the investigation of incidents. At the time of writing the outcome of 2 of these cases is not determined. In the third case a gamekeeper was convicted of setting a spring trap in the open.

Direct persecution other than poisoning

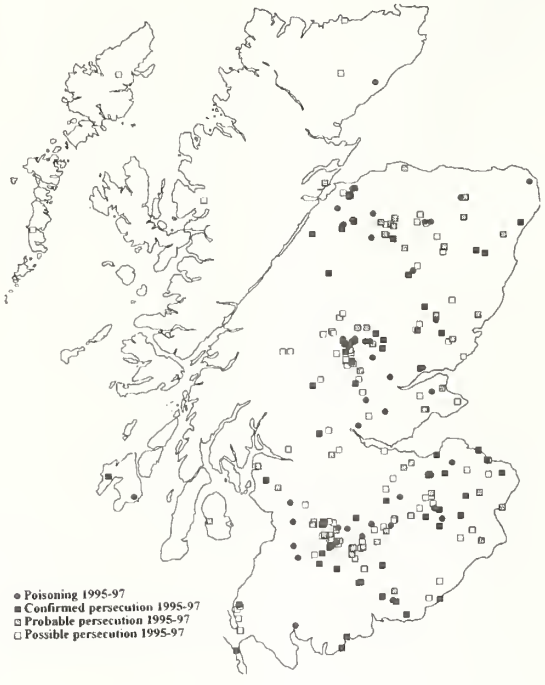
This includes all direct persecution of birds of prey such as shooting and the illegal use of cage traps or spring traps.

Sixty four of the allegations came from named informants; 2 were anonymous. In 38 of the 66 allegations an individual was named by the informant as responsible for the alleged offence. Of these 31 were gamekeepers, 3 were pigeon fanciers, 3 were estate owners or managers and one was a falconer.

In the 19 confirmed cases 10 involved a total of 11 Buzzards, 4 involved a total of 5 Peregrines, one involved a number of Hen Harrier chicks, one involved a Goshawk and one a Long-eared Owl, a Kestrel and 3 Jackdaws. The remaining 2 cases involved illegal traps where birds of prey were at risk but no raptor victim was identified. In the 12 probable cases 4 involved Buzzards, 3 involved Hen Harriers, 2 involved Peregrines, 2 involved Goshawks and one a Sparrowhawk.

Poisoning

This includes incidents where no bird of prey was involved since all examples of poison abuse in rural areas are an actual or potential threat to birds of prey. Several confirmed incidents involving poison abuse are known from urban areas but have been evaluated and judged not to represent threats to bird of prey. Forty three reports were received alleging illegal use of poisons during 1997. Forty nine such allegations were received in 1996. In 25 of the 43 reports the informant identified an individual alleged to be responsible. Twenty one of these were gamekeepers, 2 were ex gamekeepers, one was a pigeon fancier and one was a farmer.



Buzzards continue to be a large and increasing proportion of the victims recorded. This probably reflects the recolonisation by this species of much of its former range and is unlikely to indicate an increase in targeted persecution.

Of very great concern is the number of Red Kites poisoned. Four individuals died in widely separated locations. This concern is greatly increased by data so far available for 1998. At the time of writing a further 4 Red Kites have been found poisoned. This species' strong liking for feeding on carrion make it highly vulnerable. With a total Scottish population estimated at between 120 and 140 individuals and only 24 breeding pairs in 1997 the loss of 4 birds - given that the true total mortality from poisoning is likely to be considerable greater - poses a significant threat.

Carbomates (Carbofuran and Aldicarb) are now well established as the main illegal wildlife poisons, found in 16 of the 23 incidents confirmed. Carbofuran, a highly toxic systemic insecticide/ nematicide, mainly intended for root crops and brassicas, has shown a steady increase in its abuse as a wildlife poison over the past 5 years. Alpha-chloralose, once the most widely used wildlife poison, continues to be used for killing birds of prey. However, its use seems to have declined substantially in favour of Carbofuran.

Conclusions

The true extent of law breaking involving raptors will always be difficult to measure due to the nature of the terrain in which these offences take place and the secrecy surrounding such criminal activities. There are, however, some conclusions to be drawn from the 1997 figures while respecting the limited nature of these data. These conclusions do not differ significantly from those drawn from the 1996 data.

Buzzards continue to be an important "indicator" species. Their welcome return to much of lowland east Scotland is being marred but seemingly not prevented by widespread persecution. Although Buzzards are starting to distribute themselves more evenly within the available habitat in Scotland the major population strongholds continue to be in the west of the country.

As Red Kites become better established they probably will feature in increasing numbers in persecution incidents.

Hen Harriers are heavily persecuted on some grouse moors and absent as a breeding species from areas of suitable habitat as a result. This situation continues. Three probable and 6 possible cases of Hen Harrier persecution were recorded in 1997 illustrating the problems associated with gathering data for this species in its remote breeding habitat. The shooting of adult Hen Harriers (which mostly leaves little trace) is likely to have gone unrecorded.

Acknowledgements

The RSPB is most grateful for the support it receives towards its investigations and species protection work from the Scottish Office and would like to thank the police, SASA and SOAEFD for their continued work in combating wildlife crime.

Woodcock *Steven Brown*

Land management and birds on marginal hill land

In the glens of Breadalbane, Dochart, Lochy and Lyon there has been a considerable increase in deer fencing often on both sides of roads, in addition to the usual barbed wire and electric fences covering every hill field. Most of these extra fences are to keep deer out of farm stock fields and are subject to up to a 70% Government grant. Such fences cause quite a few losses of game birds, Woodcock and even thrushes.

In May and June, we have seen several fields containing nesting Peewits, 2 or 3 pairs in each, sitting on nests of 4 eggs, disturbed by contractors' ploughs and harrows, working the ground for an autumn crop - thus complete loss of young.

At the same time, estates employ contractors to spray by helicopter or hand, big stretches of Bracken, Nettle beds and Thistles.

The effect of such use of pesticides on marginal land nesters such as Whinchat,

Wheatear, Twite even Redstart, Pied and Spotted Flycatchers is considerable and most of these species are scarce. I noticed the one and only Yellowhammer in a patch of Nettles on which pesticide had been spayed, picking up a caterpillar. It would seem that there is no solution to the problem of overwhelming Bracken and Nettle growth which old fashioned ploughing or scything dealt with.

There are also a number of fields left fallow on which pesticides have been sprayed to kill off all root weeds - these fields are eventually ploughed for an autumn crop, but the damage is done in killing off most of the invertebrates. The upper parts of these glens are almost devoid of Curlews and Peewits where they used to abound pre 1970.

Pat Sandeman

Every woodland tells a story

In the June *BTO News* an interesting article discussed some of the declines which have taken place within a Nottinghamshire wood and compares this to the national picture. Under the headline *It's Not Just Nightingales* the authors pick out 3 species for which Common Birds Census and Constant Effort Ringing results in Treswell Wood showed a serious situation. It is surprising to see how different their results were to those that Allan Brown, Brian Hickman and RWJS have found in Roslin Glen, a wooded valley just outside Edinburgh.

The CBC in Roslin Glen started in 1981. It is a large woodland site of 20 hectares which is split into 2 halves, the results being combined. Counting the numbers of pairs of breeding birds involves 10 morning visits to the site, each one of which takes 2hours. The registration of birds seen and heard, as the season progresses, builds up a pattern of the territories which the birds are holding. Hearing 2 males singing against each other is a particularly helpful registration as it gives a good indication of the boundary of 2 territories. The visit maps are submitted to BTO headquarters, where they are put together into species maps, and analysed to give estimates of the number of territories for each species.

There have been many changes over the years, often associated with cold winters. conditions in the wintering areas used by migrant birds, conservation management (felling Sycamores) and Dutch Elm Disease, but for most of our birds there is no longterm trend of decline. The Nottinghamshire study picked out 3 declining species for special mention - Dunnock, Bullfinch and Spotted Flycatcher.

With Dunnock, although we are looking at only small numbers of territories, it appears that Roslin is going against the national trend, and we do not yet know why. The number of breeding pairs of Bullfinch in Treswell Wood shows a remorseless decline, with no pairs in 1996, while, after some poor years in 1993 and 1994, the Roslin figures seem to have recovered. There is a danger in making too much of what are very small numbers of pairs on one site but another long running CBC site in Midlothian reports a similar pattern for Bullfinch. Spotted Flycatchers, as every birdwatcher in the country must realise, are in a serious decline throughout the United Kingdom. They are now missing as a breeding bird in both sites and the national woodland figures show an 83% fall over the past 25 years.

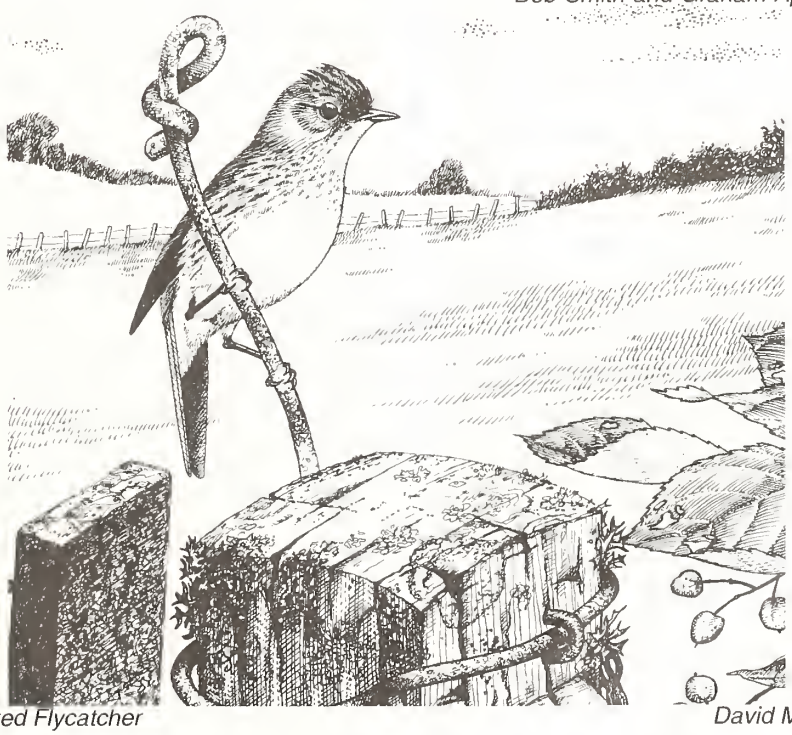
There has been a 20% drop in Robins over the 17 years of the study. This may well be linked to the loss of mature trees (perhaps over 25% due to loss of Elm and the felling of Sycamore) and extensive replanting of native hardwoods.

So, what do we conclude from all of this? There seem to be interesting differences between the story in one Scottish site and one English site. Could it be that, so far, Scotland is not suffering the huge declines in woodland birds which have been found in England? Perhaps we have not been monitoring the Roslin site for long enough. The UK CBC figures go back many years and we know that in the last 25 years Dunnock, Goldcrest, Spotted Flycatcher, Starling and Bullfinch have all declined by more than 50% in woodland and that there have been declines of more than 30% for Willow and Marsh Tits. The possibility of interesting regional differences warrants further investigation, especially if the comparison between English and Scottish woodlands might help to identify the causes of problems for these species.

We should like to finish with 3 pleas:

1 There are not enough Common Bird Census sites in Scotland.
2 We must make sure that long term monitoring of key sites continues. Bob is starting to lose Treecreepers and Goldcrests from his hearing range and Brian cannot now find the time to continue. Therefore, we need to find 2 other people to take over the site. It is an interesting area. Few plots can boast Kestrel, Woodcock and Grey Wagtail breeding alongside Blackcap, Goldcrest and Yellowhammer. If you would like to volunteer then please get in touch with Bob *via SOC at 21 Regent Terrace*. All you need is a keen ear and the ability to get up early in the morning!
3 The BTO has launched the Nightingale Appeal to raise money for research into woodland birds, not just Nightingales. It is a project which is worthy of support.

Bob Smith and Graham Appleton



Spotted Flycatcher *David Mitchell*

The 1998 breeding season in Scotland

This popular feature is put together at ultra short notice in early July and relies on the first impressions of members; it is not a definitive account. As in previous years we stress that this article is no substitute for the detailed analyses that will eventually provide a more accurate and considered picture.

The weather

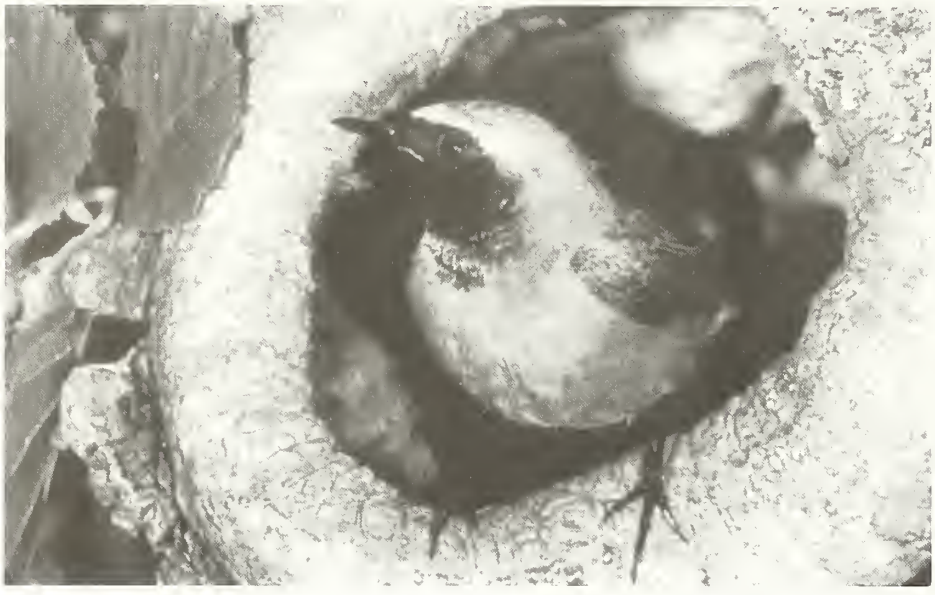
As always the weather had a big effect. The breeding season at first looked as though it would be an early one. Many cold sensitive species survived the winter well. However, gales around Easter and the second very wet June in succession, which was followed by torrential rain and below average temperatures as we put this piece together in early July, affected many birds. It is likely that the overall verdict on the 1998 breeding season will be a poor one though, as always, there are exceptions.

Small birds

Not surprisingly many small birds suffered due to the wet weather. Species that take to nest boxes are particularly suited to studies of breeding success. Nestbox workers report a very bad season for Blue and Great Tits in many parts of Scotland. Pied Flycatchers arrived in good numbers in several areas but breeding success was mostly poor. Redstarts were more numerous than in 1997 in Central but few attempted second broods.

Tree Sparrows are a species that can be easily overlooked but are now known to have suffered as agriculture has become more intensive. They are now the subject of several surveys. In Borders and the southeast of Scotland they seem to be even scarcer than was suspected. Some nextbox schemes reported good occupancy but breeding success was not always favourable.

Wrens, Long-tailed Tits and other small residents survived the winter well. So too did Stonechats which are gradually, though very slowly, recolonising many inland sites. Migrant chats, such as Wheatear and Whinchat, were reported as down in numbers in some, but by no means all, areas. There were mixed reports about the numbers of Ring Ouzels. Several correspondents commented that Song Thrushes are still reasonably common in many parts of Scotland. The serious decline in this species which has been highlighted by UK monitoring schemes may have been exaggerated because schemes such as the CBC are biased towards southeast England. Thrushes and Blackbirds, at least in the early part of the breeding season, seemed to have had better success than some other passerines. No doubt worms and snails were readily available in the damp conditions. Another passerine that seems well adapted to wet weather is the Dipper which was reported as doing fairly well in several places. Wagtails seem to have started the season in reasonable numbers but many broods failed. Sand Martins also seem to have had a poor season.



Redstart *Photographer not known*

Warblers, especially Blackcaps, Willow Warlbers and Chiffchaffs, arrived in good numbers in many parts of Scotland. Reports on other species were more mixed though several people felt that the poor weather may have made birds like Grasshopper Warbler harder to locate. Wood Warblers declined in several well known sites. However Nightjars, a species one associates with warm southern weather, were churring in Galloway and one was heard as far north as Wester Ross.

Ayrshire's first Nuthatch was heard singing in May. This species is now well established in Borders where, in 1997 it was estimated there were 30 pairs at 12 sites; this year the picture is incomplete but 2 sites alone held 15 territories.

Some seed eating species have increased probably due to set aside and other factors which increase the supply of weed seeds. Local increases, however welcome in species such as Goldfinch, have still not restored the populations of these birds to previous levels. Corn Buntings continue to be very scarce or absent over much of Scotland. A reduction in seeds, this time in conifers, meant that Siskins and Crossbills were at low numbers in many forests.

Ground nesters

Although damp weather seems to have helped waders obtain food in many fields and river valleys the overall picture for ground nesting birds is a poor one. Birds such as Lapwing, Curlew and Snipe are already at a low ebb on farmland, especially in the more arable east of Scotland. Many waders lost eggs or chicks due to the weather. Common Sandpipers were said to be down at least in some areas; the cause unknown. Higher up, several people commented that Golden Plovers had fared badly. This may also be true with Dotterel although this comment is based on very few observations. At least one contributor thought that several important Flow Country species had done badly. On the Outer Hebrides many waders did rather better, at least in the early part of the season; Ringed Plover were an exception.

Predators

Several predatory species associated with moorland had a poor year. This was not entirely due to the weather. Several raptor workers report that Hen Harriers are being

persecuted to local extinction. On Orkney, where persectuion is not a significant factor, the weather seems to have badly affected Hen Harrier chicks. There is also evidence of persecution with Peregrines. Only one young was reared from 6 Golden Eagle home ranges checked in Central and Tayside. In this area Peregrines seem to have had a reasonable year.

Some moorland birds failed to breed at all in many areas, notably Short-eared Owls. Merlins did badly with several long running studies reporting one of their worst ever seasons.

Barn Owls came through the winter well but bred badly. In some areas Tawny Owls seem not to have bred at all. Ospreys increased. Buzzards continued to spread. Their breeding success in Easter Ross varied according to the availabilty of Rabbits.

Seabirds

Many seabirds had a poor season Kittiwakes were down in number at a number of monitored colonies, for example a third less on the Isle of May. Their breeding success is not fully known but almost certainly has been very poor or at least below average at sites as varied as Shetland, St Kilda and the Firth of Forth. Terns arrived in encouraging numbers at many colonies but breeding success was often affected by weather and, at some sites, by predators including Ferrets and Mink. Seabird numbers at North Sutor of Cromarty were down as a result of a wreck earlier in the year - see page 11. Breeding success for several seabirds is not yet known. A census of Puffins on the Isle of May led to an estimate of 40,000 pairs.

Few reports of waterfowl were received Eider were at record numbers at Nigg but said to be suffering from predation at some other sites. Slavonian Grebes are still at low levels north of the Great Glen. Greylag Geese continue to expand. The Mute Swans on Lochs Stenness and Harray in Orkney increased to 60 pairs. The population is normally around 35 pairs but this rose to 115 pairs following an invasion by Canadian Pondweed. When the Pondweed crashed so did the swans to a low point of 13 pairs in 1992.

This feature is made possible by a large number of fieldworkers and recorders who take the trouble at a busy time of year to fill in a form. This year we would like to thank Paul Collin, Martin Cook, Brian Cosnette, Paul Daw,Norman Elkins, Ron Forrester, Pete Gordon, Sandra Hacker, Mike Harris, Malcolm Harvey, Darren Hemsley, Cliff Henty, Angus Hogg, Mark Holling, Alex Joss, Donnie Macdonald, Eric Meek, Peter Miller, Ray Murray, Brian Neath, Ian Poxton, Brian Rabbitts, Gordon Riddle, Henry Robb, Dominic Sargent, Geoff Shaw, Patrick Stirling-Aird, Bob Swann, Andy Thorpe, Sarah Wanless, Ron Youngman. Apologies if anyone has been missed. If you would like to contribute in 1999 let Sylvia know at 21 Regent Terrace.

Sylvia Laing and Stan da Prato

Barn Owl *Frances Godfrey*

BTO suffers funding cut

SOC members and other birdwatchers who participate in BTO schemes and surveys make a major contribution to conservation. The Joint Nature Conservation Committee is the forum through which the 3 country nature conservation agencies, including Scottish Natural Heritage, deliver their statutory responsibilities. The longterm partnership between the JNCC and its predecessors and BTO has enabled the development of bird population monitoring schemes that are internationally respected and envied. JNCC and the country agencies have used data and information collected by thousands of amateurs to promote the conservation of sites and habitats, as well as to highlight the needs of individual species. Were it not for the willingness of so many people to give their time and to cover the costs of their own fieldwork, conservation bodies could not find the millions of pounds needed to have the work done by paid staff.

With the ending of an 8 year contract in March 1998, the partnership has been renewed through a new contract that will run until 2004. Unfortunately, JNCC's contribution in 1998-99 will be cut to only 85% of its 1997-98 contribution. This reduction means that the work has had to be cut even below the package BTO believe to be the essential minimum. The cut in JNCC's contribution is not because the work is of poor quality. It is because JNCC's budget has been substantially reduced in recent years. That budget is set by the country conservation agencies, who themselves have suffered cuts in their funding from central government.

BTO has decided to concentrate the cuts in areas where the cuts appear less likely to cause damage to their overall work programme. The nest record scheme sees a 30% cut which will lead to almost complete cessation of feedback to volunteers and a reduction in annual monitoring of breeding performance from 52 species to about 20, which will seriously reduce the ability of the conservation agencies to detect warning signals in reduced breeding success. The inputting of past data will be reduced and there will be less analytical work. There will be a 64% cut in studies of environmental change and habitat work. There will be a 24% cut in the system of 'alerts' which uses data from the various monitoring schemes to alert conservation agencies when a species is in serious decline. Ringers will have to pay more for the rings they use.

The only good news is that BTO is now less dependent on central government grant than it used to be. It is not long ago that half of its income came from the JNCC's predecessor the Nature Conservancy Council.

New Labour - old failings?

The election of a new government has not meant an end to cuts in conservation funding. The cuts to BTO detailed in this issue are only one reason why concern is growing that Labour is not honouring its manifesto promise to ensure greater protection for wildlife.

Last year, a coalition of conservation charities launched a Wildlife Charter calling for new laws to protect Britain's network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest. The situation is most critical in England, where 45% of the 4,000 SSSIs are suffering from damage or neglect. The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, enacted by the post war Labour government, established Britain's first wildlife and habitat protection laws. It created national parks, though not in Scotland, and established the SSSI network. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 updated the 1949 Act, strengthening protection for SSSIs but still leaving much power in the hands of landowners. Labour's 1997 election manifesto pledged to introduce strengthened wildlife laws. If new legislation is announced in the autumn's Queen's Speech it would probably reach the statute book in 2000. If as is now rumoured it will be delayed until the 1999 Queen's Speech it would not become law until 2001.

Stan da Prato

Seventy years of birding

Time passes for birdwatchers as well as the birds they study. This article was originally published in the Edinburgh Ringing Group Report for 1977 under the title Fifty years of birding. It is even more useful today in giving a first hand insight into the ornithological scene during and either side of the Second World War. We are most grateful to GLS for sharing his memories with us.

Young enthusiasts

Although bird ringing in Scotland started in 1909 with Landsborough Thomson's scheme at Aberdeen University my own involvement came later in the 1930s. I was one of a small group of self styled "young energetic bird enthusiasts" who decided to pool their energies and keep records of the local avifauna. The result of this was the Inverleith Field Club which was started in October 1929. Members were encouraged to visit certain areas regularly and record their observations in the Club Record Book. Observations were relatively unsystematic and, for the commoner species, we had little idea of the numbers involved. I doubt, for instance, if there was great ornithological significance in the fact that the Kestrel from the Edinburgh Botanic Gardens flew over the adjacent Ladies' Missionary College on Guy Fawkes Night in 1929. However, our records of the scarcer species are still of some interest, for example the number of Snow Buntings which wintered in Inverleith Park in the 1930s would be considered remarkable today. The Field Club led to the founding of the Midlothian Ornithological Club in 1933. Full of youthful confidence we drew up a formidable list of aims and regulations for the membership - this to be limited to a few "reliable observers". The accent was to be on field work and, if any member ceased to be active he, (there were no women) could be blackballed by the others and compulsorily retired.

Oxford example

The impetus to set up the MOC was provided by the example of the Oxford Ornithological Society which E M Nicholson had founded in 1927. The thinking behind both clubs was that a number of ornithologists working an area could build up a picture of the birdlife throughout the seasons far better than any individual. Although this seems self evident today with over 600 people contributing to the annual Scottish Bird Report, conditions before the 1939-45 War were very different. Many of the most experienced ornithologists in Edinburgh - and elsewhere - were collectors. Our notes often had to be strictly confidential, due to the risk of collectors abusing the information. When we did decide to publish, our main outlet was the *Scottish Naturalist*. The *Scot Nat* covered other branches of natural history besides birds - purely ornithological journals like *Scottish Birds* and its predecessor the *Edinburgh Bird Bulletin* not appearing until the post war period. Our main reference work was T A Coward's beautifully illustrated *The Birds of the British Isles* published in 3 volumes in 1920. On a more local level the standard work was E V Baxter and L J Rintouls' *A Vertebrate Fauna of Forth* which was published in 1935 and incorporated many early observations by MOC members.

Some of the many ornithologists who have visited the Isle of May over the years. This photograph was taken by Keith Brockie in 1994. The 60th anniversary of the Isle of May Bird Observatory.

First survey

The first MOC survey was of local Starling roosts; unlike more recent surveys only the location of the roosts and not the numbers of birds were noted. Our ringing activities were largely confined to the breeding season as mist nets did not arrive till about 1960 when they revolutionised the ringing scheme. The normal procedure was to ring a brood of nestlings and hope that one would be recovered. However, there was one way of catching adult birds and that was in the wood and wire netting structures universally known as Heligoland Traps. These took their name from the pioneering observatory on an island in the North Sea which scientists employed by the German government started in 1909.

The Isle of May

British ornithologists had long been aware of the value of visiting remote islands in spring and autumn to study migration. From 1907 to 1933 the Misses Rintoul and Baxter had regularly visited the Isle of May in the Forth and noted many species of migrants, including several rarities. The normal method of checking the identification of an unusual bird in those days was to shoot it, and the May often witnessed the somewhat incongruous sight of 2 respectable ladies pursuing some unfortunate warbler or bunting with loaded shotguns. The MOC felt that starting an observatory on the island modelled on the Heligoland pattern would allow birds to be ringed and information on migration gathered. In his book on the island W J Eggeling records that 3 MOC parties landed between autumn 1932 and spring 1934 before the decision was taken to erect a trapping station. The first spring expedition was from 8-15 May 1934 when we recorded 59 species. Apart from migrants, we noted several Fulmars - then prospecting in the Forth - and numerous terns which used to breed abundantly on the island. The expenses for the week recall a bygone era: the sum of £2 6s 7d was sufficient for transport to and from Edinburgh, a week's food and 8/4d of refreshment en route. The first trap was erected late in 1934 and the Isle of May became the second bird observatory in Britain, the first being on the Welsh island of Skokholm, started by R M Lockley

in 1933. MOC members visited the May till 1938 when the island was taken over by the Admiralty.

Overseas

War is a horrible business but it had its compensations. Service overseas was the first opportunity many ornithologists had of seeing the rich avifauna of North Africa and continental Europe. Some MOC members found themselves even further afield and notes from the Middle East, India, Burma and most of the oceans of the world were circulated in the correspondence which we kept up from 1939 to 1945. The first field guide did not appear till 1953 so my time in North Africa and Italy was frustrated by identification problems. I recall that the raptors and larks were particularly difficult. My standard references were 2 volumes of Dresser which were too large to fit easily into a rucksack, never mind a pocket. There was one very useful small book on *The Birds of Europe and North Africa* by Col Wardlaw Ramsay; its main drawback being the complete absence of illustrations and distribution maps. At least I had the freedom to go looking for birds during breaks from active service although minefields and broken bridges often put interesting areas out of bounds. Some other birdwatchers of my generation - including my cousin, George Waterston - had to confine their observations to whatever species visited German POW camps.

Back home

One of the first tasks to be dealt with back home was the future of the Observatory on the Isle of May. The success of the 1934-38 seasons led to the MOC circulating a prospectus - beautifully printed on card and featuring a drawing of the island by Donald Watson - with the object if setting up the Observatory on a permanent basis. Help was asked for - and forthcoming - from the Scottish Universities and £40 was raised to repair the traps. Charges were fixed at 2/6d per person per day. In 1947 the Observatory was handed over to its new custodians, a committee representing the MOC, the Universities and the Commissioners of Northern Lighthouses and it continues to be manned by groups of visiting ornithologists for about 8 months of every year.

There was also plenty to do in the Lothians. The 5 day week was an unheard of luxury to most people who had to work till lunchtime on Saturdays. This limited the range of our activities considerably. One of the first surveys after the War was a Rookery Survey carried out using Army maps and references as well as the more familiar OS maps which were in short supply. Although free time was limited, we tried to make the best possible use of it. Weekends and summer evenings provided enough time for regular visits to places like Cobbinshaw and Threipmuir Reservoirs and Portmore Loch, while summer holidays allowed exploration further afield, usually in the Highlands and Islands. Notes from these outings were eventually used by the Misses Rintoul and Baxter who were to summarize 2 lifetimes of patient fieldwork and correspondence by publishing *The Birds of Scotland* in 1953. Over the years they had built up a reputation for their knowledge of Scottish avifauna and were frequently asked to give lectures or escort visiting ornithologists round the country. A letter from Evelyn Baxter in 1947 gives an idea of their characteristic style, "...The trip with the foreigners, 40 of them, to Inverness went off well - all the birds turned up and the weather was on its best behaviour - what should I have done with 40 foreigners if it had rained?"

Fair Isle

The success of the Isle of May led to the idea of setting up another island bird observatory, this time on the much more remote site of Fair Isle. The observatory opened in 1948. The first guests paid £5 5s for a week's stay to include bird rings, use of bicycles and other equipment. Besides towels and soap they were expected to bring their ration books with them. It is interesting to look back on the ideas current before radar observations revealed so much about migration. The value of a small remote island as a resting place for tired migrants and a place where observations can be made relatively easily had been recognised in the 1890s. A popular idea, originating with Eagle Clarke before the 1914-18 War was that "Fair Isle ... lies in the direct line of the migrants which pass through Britain to and from Northern Europe". In 1948 the Fair Isle prospectus had on its cover a map showing 2 narrow migration routes converging on Shetland. One starts in Greenland and goes through Iceland and the Faroes, the other runs from Spitzbergen and Novaya Zemlaya down through Scandinavia. Fair Isle's first director was Kenneth Williamson who went on to make important contributions to our knowledge of how birds are affected by weather and climate. He soon realised that 'falls' of migrants were associated with certain weather patterns, notably south east winds and rain, and the most interesting arrivals had clearly been drifted well off course. Regular correspondence showed that events on Fair Isle and the Isle of May were often the product of the same weather patterns, suggesting a 'broad front' arrival, rather than a narrowly defined migration corridor. Contact between Edinburgh and Fair Isle was assured by the annual migration of the Director to a flat in India Street, which he occupied when the observatory was closed in winter.

Bittern *Angus Hogg*

Ringing

Nearer home, bird ringing continued to be mainly a spring and summer activity. Rings cost 9/- per hundred or 1/10d. for 20, irrespective of size. Far fewer sizes were available than today, so most had to be overlapped on the bird's leg. Ring loss was a constant problem as ringers were always worried in case they put the rings on too tightly. One of the amusing results of this was that a ring which fell off the tarsus of a young Gannet on the Bass Rock was found by another ringer who later used it on a Bittern!

Some idea of the scope of our ringing can be gauged from the MOC ringing totals for 1949. Most of birds were nestlings except for one House Martin and one Moorhen. The most numerous species was the Gannet but the most notable, given its recent decline, was Roseate Tern with 306 chicks ringed.

A few adult birds were ringed by using small traps in people's back gardens. One of our few successful attempts to catch numbers of fledged birds was in February-March 1948 in the Botanic Gardens. We

obtained permission to try to catch some of the many Starlings which were roosting in the Holly bushes. Using Herring netting strung up on bamboo poles proved reasonably successful and several of these winter Starlings were recovered in summer in Scandinavia.

For many years the Ringing Scheme was organised by the redoubtable Miss Leach. When we decided to start a tern ringing programme on the Forth islands we wrote enquiring as to the correct ring sizes for Roseates, pointing out that the BTO list made no mention of the species. Back came the reply, "...On our Bird Ringing Committee size list we do not mention them at all for the same reason that many other species are not mentioned viz that it is obvious that they must take the same size as a practically similar bird." In those days the modern printed recovery forms were a thing of the future. Details of spectacular recoveries were likely to arrive on the backs of scrap pieces of paper. One which I still have consists of part of the Outings Programme of the South Kensington Conservative Association. Whether this reflects the political views of the Ringing Office I have no idea - perhaps a day in Rye at 14/- including tea was the real attraction. On the reverse was a fine series of 9 Gannet recoveries from the Bass Rock - 3 from the French coast, one off Holland, the furthest south in Rio de Oro (West Africa) and the rest scattered round the British Isles.

Terns

Tern ringing proved extremely productive. Between 1947 and 1961 we ringed nearly 3,000 Roseate Terns on the islands in the upper Forth, which gives some idea of the high population in those days. With the Sandwich Terns the limiting factor was not the number of chicks but the cost of the rings! A steady stream of recoveries showed that the Sandwich and Roseate Terns of the Forth wintered off the West African coast as far south as Angola. In contrast to their behaviour in British waters these terns will come to bait placed on the tideline in Africa. Many of our recoveries were due to birds being killed for food by Africans or for use in dissection classes in local schools.

Shared experiences

I have been fortunate to have watched a variety of birds in a number of places. In retrospect, it is not just the birds which have kept my interest in ornithology alive over the years, but the pleasure of birding in wild and beautiful places like the Isle of May, especially when the experience has been shared by like minded friends. The person who could best express the attractions of birding to our generation was the late Professor Maury Meiklejohn. MFMM was a veteran of expeditions to the May, and, when things were quiet, he generally produced some verse or comment to enliven the proceedings. A sense of humour is essential in any human activity and there was never any danger of MOC members taking themselves too seriously when they read lines like the following from Maury's classic, "The Ornithologists's Early Morning Walk":

No wonder under such conditions
He is a man of inhibitions.
In an advanced neurotic state
The Dunnock twitters to his mate
"That egg you laid today was blotched
I think it comes from being watched."
The Heron murmurs pessimistically
"Can I, oh can I, be statistically
Significant, or can I not"
And th' unbridled Guillemot
Bewildered by so many 'ifs'
Is seen to hurl himself from cliffs.
All birds would rather quite their perch
Than be a subject of Research.

Gerard Sandeman

Roseate Tern *Steven Brown*

Inchgarth Field, Aberdeen - an SOC managed reserve

Inchgarth Reservoir takes in water from the River Dee at Cults on the outskirts of Aberdeen. It holds sizeable numbers of roosting birds including Wigeon, Goosander and gulls, particularly over the winter months. Immediately to the east of the reservoir lies a field of about 35 acres consisting of rough grassland and a large area of rushes. There is a boggy area in one corner and a shallow pool near the middle. The amount of water present in these depends on recent precipitation and the level of water in the Dee. The area is a popular walking and birding spot with local people and a reasonable birdlist has resulted. David Landsman, an SOC member who is resident in the area, noted that NOSWA (North of Scotland Water Authority) were doing nothing with the field and approached them with a view to it being made into a reserve. He subsequently contacted the local SOC committee and set the ball rolling. Negotiations with NOSWA through David took several months but we now have the field to manage as a reserve for wildlife on a 5 year renewable lease at a 'peppercorn' rent.

Our aim is to manage the field as a wetland habitat to encourage breeding waders such as Snipe, Lapwing and Redshank. The management plan is still being developed and we are monitoring the site for changing water levels and for birds. The field has been let out for grazing cattle in the past and we intend to continue this but not during the breeding season. The other main task is to get rid of a good proportion of the rushes. This will probably be done by 'topping' at the end of the year. It is also intended to make the pool more attractive to waders by providing more of an edge habitat; at present it is surrounded by the rushes. Managing a reserve is, of course, a completely new venture for us and we look forward to seeing how the area develops.

Alistair Duncan

This is an excellent example of local members doing really useful things in their area. We look forward to publishing a follow up article and to other branches and groups letting us know about their projects.

Another Moray Firth seabird wreck

In April 1998 gale force north easterly winds accompanied by ferocious blizzards hit the Moray Firth at the start of the month. It has long been known that such prolonged spells of strong offshore winds can create feeding difficulties for seabirds in the North Sea. What was unusual about this event was its timing, being right at the start of the seabird breeding season.

First indications that something was wrong was when Dave Galloway phoned the RSPB office to report 60+ auks washed up on Chanonry beach. Brian Etheridge was also getting reports of large numbers being washed up in the Beauly Firth and a couple of visits showed a major wreck was certainly in progress. From 18 April I started to organise coverage of the inner firths. Jaquie Heaton covered much of the south side of the Beauly Firth, Dave Butterfield the Cromarty Firth, Simon Foster and myself the southern shores of the Dornoch Firth and Simon Foster and Brian Etheridge parts of the Inverness Firth, whilst Lyn Wells checked the Dornoch area. It became evident early on that the biggest concentrations of dead birds were in the inner firths, particularly on NE facing beaches. Results of the counts are shown in Table 1.

Observers were asked, where possible, to age the birds they collected. These results are shown, for all aged birds in all sections combined in Table 2. The percentage of birds, especially Shags and auks in full adult plumage, was surprisingly high, especially Guillemots with 57% of aged birds being in full adult plumage. The high percentage of adult birds involved in this wreck was backed up by the 12 recoveries of ringed Guillemots. Of the 11 we have details of so far, one bird was 12 years old and an established breeder, one was 8 years old, 3 were 7 years old and 6 were 6 years old.

Table 2 Ages of birds involved in wreck

	Adult	imm	% adult
Red-throated Diver	2	9	18%
Shag	19	1	95%
Guillemot	192	146	57%
Razorbill	53	33	62%
Puffin	3	5	38%
Black Guillemot	6	1	86%

Note: not all birds were aged. The 2 adult Red-throated Divers were actually subadults.

Razorbill *David Mitchell*

This is the third wreck to affect the Moray Firth during the 1990s. In all 537 corpses were collected on 38km of shore (14.1 birds per km). This, as usual, represents a minimum figure. Many areas were not counted, especially the outer shore of the Moray Firth east of Ardersier where we know, from reports from members of the public to the RSPB office, that large numbers of birds were also being washed up. Each Moray Firth wreck appears to have its own unique characteristics. The unusual feature of this wreck was the high concentration of corpses in the Inner Firths, especially the Beauly (34.6 birds per km.). Although Guillemots, as always, dominated (69% of all corpses), there were more divers, Razorbills, Puffins and Black Guillemots involved than normal. The percentage of adult birds involved was also much higher than average. Typically wrecks mainly affect immature birds. For instance, during the 1994 wreck only 25% of all Guillemots were in adult plumage (Swann 1995, *SBN*:34) compared to the 57% in this wreck. Adults also predominated amongst the corpses of Shags, Razorbills and Black Guillemots, all of which breed locally in small numbers. The Red-throated Divers affected, however, were mainly immatures or sub-adults. Presumably most breeding adults had already moved out of the Moray Firth back to their northern breeding grounds prior to the wreck.

There was evidence from ringing recoveries of Guillemots that most of the birds involved were from local Moray Firth colonies, with 11 of the 12 ringed birds having been ringed at the North Sutor colony, which would have been very exposed to the severe NE winds. Indeed a visit to this colony on 26 April showed that no Guillemots had laid, nor had any Shags. In fact very few Shags even had nests capable of holding eggs. Normally by this time quite a few would have been incubating.

It appears that many birds had been driven by the gales into the Inner Firths, for shelter and a lack of food in these areas resulted in a high death rate. The Guillemots involved probably contained a large number of inexperienced breeders (most Guillemots only start breeding when 5 or 6 years old). This may well have an impact on breeding numbers at these colonies this summer. The Inner Moray Firth has only a small breeding population of Razorbills and even smaller one of Black Guillemots. If it was local breeding birds of these species that were killed the wreck will have had a major impact on their local populations. We will need to await the results of the summer census to see what has actually happened.

Bob Swann

Table 1 Number of corpses counted on different firths during the April 1998 wreck

	Dornoch Pt - Embo	Dornoch Firth	Shandwick Bay	Cromarty Firth	Beauly Firth	Inverness Firth	Total
Distance covered	**5.0km**	**5.5km**	**1.5km**	**14.0km**	**5.0km**	**7.0km**	**38.0km**
Red-throated Diver		2		1	6	3	12
Fulmar		1	2		3	5	11
Shag	1	8	4		3	4	20
Guillemot	27	45	9	66	136	88	371
Razorbill	9	9	2	7	22	40	89
Puffin	1	5	2				8
Black Guillemot		5	1		1		7
Kittiwake		2	2	1		1	13
Others	4	2		3	2	2	13

The others consisted of a single Slavonian Grebe, Cormorant, Long-tailed Duck, Shelduck, Eider, Little Auk and 6 gulls. On the Beauly Firth a Balearic Shearwater was also found, one of the first records of this new species in the Moray Firth.

Recorders' recommendations: where to watch birds on the east coast in autumn

Given an easterly component to the wind in autumn, several sites have a proven ability to attract migrants and indeed to turn up the rarities which are the icing on the cake of any fall. Unsurprisingly, the best areas tend to be promontories or headlands and consequently prove to be excellent seawatching sites as well. So if things are quiet on land it may still be worth trying your luck out to sea.

Lapland Bunting at Girdleness *Malcolm Watson*

We start at the very north at Noss Head. This area has seen some good falls of migrants over the years with occasional surprises like Red-breasted Flycatcher, Pallas's Warbler and Wryneck. Permission *must* be obtained from the farmer to walk around the fam buildings - do not enter the gardens. Nearby, at Wick River the trees and bushes hold passing migrants while the river can be very good for wading birds such as Little Stint, Spotted Redshank, Black-tailed Godwit and Ruff. Good spots for sea watching near Wick are at the North and South Heads, the low cliffs at the entrance to Wick Bay. Both places are accessible by car and can be good for skuas and shearwaters.

Along the north coast Dunnet and Sandside Bays are often good for waders including trans Atlantic waders. Dunnet Bay is also good for divers with large rafts of Great Northerns on occasion. Last year saw Sabine's Gulls, Leach's and Storm Petrels during the first week of September. At the end of the month Long-tailed and Pomarine Skuas are present. The lochs at Watten and St John's usually have large numbers of diving ducks. Both lochs were recently visited by a male Lesser Scaup.

In Aberdeenshire we have Rattray Head, just over a mile to the east of the south end of Loch of Strathbeg. Park at the old Coastguard Station (NK093582) and check the small patches of cover in this area. Past highlights have included Siberian Stonechat, Arctic Redpoll, Common Rosefinch, Little and Rustic Buntings and mainland Scotland's second Short-toed Lark. Early mornings are best as the scant cover means birds often move through quickly.

Girdleness, on the south side of the mouth of the River Dee in Aberdeen, is a top area for passerine migrants, with birds attracted to the cover afforded by the golf course and its immediate surrounds and areas adjacent to Nigg Bay. The only Scottish record of Isabelline Wheatear is from here in October/November 1979, while more recently a male Desert Wheatear was present for a day in November 1997. Do not forget the Ythan Estuary. It can be difficult to work but is excellent for waders, terns and wildfowl from August onwards. A rising tide pushes birds past the Waulkmill hide where goods views can be obtained. Nearby Cotehill Loch and Meikle Loch are also worth checking.

The Angus coast is blessed with numerous patches of cover for migrants, which are underwatched. Two of the best sites are Fishtown of Usan (N0725546) and Mains of Usan, particularly in the vicinity of Usan House (N0723554). Park sensibly taking care not to block access and view from the roads. Usan House is private. Easthaven, a mile or so northeast of Carnoustie, was host to Ortolan Bunting and Arctic Redpoll recently. Follow the minor road east at the sharp bend of the A930 in Carnoustie for a couple of miles before turning right under the railway line to reach the car park (N0591 362). Respect the privacy of the local residents when checking the gardens.

Fife Ness, which lies just over 2 miles to the northeast of Crail, is the county's premier site for both migrant passerines and seabirds. Park either at Kilminning (N0631 088) or the golf club car park (N0632099) and explore the area on foot. Please do not block vehicular access to the Coastguard Station nor park at Balcomie Farm, and respect the privacy of the residents and caravan owners. Fife Ness Muir, a small area of cover between the golf course and caravan park at the point, was host to mainland Scotland's first ever Red-flanked Bluetail in October 1976. Other areas worth a look are Wormiston Spinney (NO614093) and Denburn Wood on the eastern outskirts of Crail which had both Arctic and Subalpine Warblers in September 1996.

The Isle of May has a long and distinguished history of attracting passage migrants, and in autumn Grey Seals haul out to pup. There are regular trips from Anstruther (01333 310103 for details) though the rough weather that brings in the birds can prevent landings.

In Lothian, there are several excellent sites along the coast for migrants, with the best stretch a few miles to the southeast of Dunbar encompassing Barns Ness (NT724773), Skateraw Harbour (NT738754) and the road leading down to the car park there and Thorntonloch (NT752744). All sites are signposted from the Al. Out of many autumn highlights pride of place must go to the Red-eyed Vireo found at East Barns in October 1991.

Spectacular skua passage up the Forth, at Hound Point occurs after north winds drive birds into the North Sea and clear weather lures them across to the Clyde. The wader scrape at Musselburgh is a welcome additon to an already important site which always holds thousands of birds and turns up rarities, notably gulls and terns, which have included Scotlands first record of Lesser Crested Tern, and waders, including several American species. Aberlady Bay and Tyninghame are classic estuaries for waders and ducks, with roosting Pink-footed Geese a major attraction at Aberlady from early September.

St. Abbs Head in Borders has a truly excellent track record for attracting autumn migrants. It lies just over 2 miles to the northeast of Coldingham and access is via the B6438 with parking available at the visitors centre at Northfield Farm(NT91 3674). From here you can either follow the tarmac road heading north towards the lighthouse or follow a path 300 yards east

from the car park then head north along the cliffs. The vegetation around the Mire Loch should be carefully checked. The first mainland Scottish record of Aquatic Warbler was here in late August 1977. Coldingham Bay just south of St. Abbs is also well worth checking and the second ever Olive-backed Pipit for mainland Scotland was trapped here in October 1991.

Compilied by Stuart Rivers with contributions from Ian Andrews, Peter Miller and Andy Thorpe.

Argyll in autumn

Loch Gilp and the Add Estuary at Crinan are worth a look for waders and wildfowl. The sea around the mouth of West Loch Tarbert and the Sound of Gigha in October is outstanding for Black-throated and Great Northern Divers and Slavonian Grebes and can be observed from the mainland at Ardpatrick or Ronachan Point. The most productive mainland site is Uisaed Point at Machrihanish. From late August to October large numbers of Manx and a few Sooty Shearwaters may be seen and this is probably the most likely place to see a Balearic Shearwater. Storm Petrels are regular in September and Leach's if the weather conditons are right. If westerly gales have been blowing this is also a good place to look out for Sabine's Gulls.

On the way to the islands the ferries to Islay, Colonsay or Tiree, especially from late August through September, can produce impressive flocks of Manx Shearwaters together with the odd Sooty or Balearic as well as petrels, auks and skuas. As well as the large flocks of geese for which Islay is famous from October onwards Loch Indaal has good numbers of waterfowl. The western headlands can be good places to look for Sabine's Gulls. There are the resident Choughs and the largest flocks of Twite in Argyll.

Many of these can also be seen on Tiree as well as large flocks of Whooper Swans from late September and hundreds of Greylag Geese from late August. Skuas have been recorded from the headlands and sometimes Little Auks. This is another good island for late migrants and the odd rarity is never out of the question! The Strand connecting Oronsay and Colonsy is good for a wide variety of waders. Again there are resident Choughs and flocks of Twite.

Lastly Loch Don on Mull has Whooper Swans at this time as well as Wigeon and Bar-tailed Godwits and Loch Acridain is good for divers and Slavonian Grebes. This is also a good time of the year to see the impressive variety of raptors that can be found on the island.

Paul Daw

Firecrest *Stuart Rivers*

The Outer Hebrides

The inhabited islands stretch for some 130 miles and few birders visit after spring and summer despite excellent opportunities to find their own rarity. With only a handful of resident birders coverage is poor. The Butt of Lewis is good for seawatching and Loch Stiapavat has held many rarities over the years. On the west coast Great Bernera and Uig and a little further south the sheltered bay at Bragar and adjacent Loch Ordais stand out. The only large mixed woodland in the islands is at Stornoway. Just outside the town at Steinish there was a Blackpoll Warbler in 1996. The Eye Peninsula is worth visiting. On Harris the Sound of Taransay at Luskentyre should not be missed. After leaving the ferry cross the Sound of Harris to North Uist. The cover at Clachan Farm (Veery in 1995)is worth checking. Although Aird an Runair is the place to watch for skuas in spring Griminish Point should be better for seawatching in autumn. Balranald to Loch Paible and Loch Sandary can be productive at times for a range of species; also Baleshare further south. Benbecula has some lochs which can be easily covered from the road and for gull enthusiasts the rubbish tip is not to be missed! Over the South Ford and on to South Uist where some good places to visit are Ardivachar Point, Loch Druidibeg plantation (Swainson's Thrush, 1996), Rubha Ardvule and North Locheynort plantation. Many lochs are viewable from the road and have hosted rarities over the years.

Brian Rabbitts

Charles Frank

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Frazzled Hedgehogs!

Fences with electric charges are being used in the Outer Hebrides to protect bird nesting sites from Hedgehogs suspected of eating a large number of eggs. Seven hedgehogs were brought to South Uist in about 1974, possibly to show to schoolchildren, or to control slugs in crofters' gardens. Some escaped and their numbers on North and South Uist have soared to about 10,000 because they have no natural predators.

The RSPB has erected 2 types of fencing on South Uist; one is standard anti Rabbit fencing, the other is an experimental barrier, 18 inches high and 1,200 yards long, with electric wire on top to stop Hedgehogs climbing over. Those Hedgehogs caught within the 'exclusion zone' are being lifted out and some fitted with tiny transmitters to monitor their movements.

The Uists have the most important concentration of breeding waders in Britain, including Lapwing, Redshank, Oystercatcher and Snipe. There are also some of the highest breeding densities of Dunlin and Ringed Plover in the world, nesting each year on the machair. Numbers of some species have fallen dramatically by up to 50% because their nests are being robbed – probably by Hedgehogs.

New reserve for Bean Geese

Situated on the Slamannan Plateau south of Cumbernauld the reserve at Fannyside Mill Farm includes 60 hectares of wet pasture and a small loch which provides an undisturbed roost for Scotland's only wintering flock of Bean Geese. At Fannyside their number have ranged between 100 and 150 birds, with a peak of 155 earlier this year. This represents about 30% of all Bean Geese which over winter in Britain.

Because Bean Geese are prone to disturbance and as this is a small reserve it is not possible to allow visitor access. However, public roads through the reserve offer good views of the site, including the loch, but visitors are requested not to leave the roadside.

RSPB is offering the grazing on the reserve to local farmers and, by working closely with them, the land will be managed for both birds and stock.

To see the geese look for watch points and please recognise that the active assitance of local farmers is essential if the geese are to continue to use the area. The watch points have been established with the permission of the farmers who receive no payment for their cooperation John Simpson of Clyde branch suggests visitors consider making a voluntary donation perhaps £1 per car into the farmer's letterbox . Information on the whereabouts of the geese will be put out on *Birdline Scotland 0891 700234*. Anyone interested in joining the **Bean Goose Study Group should contact John Simpson, 3 Mitchell Drive, Cardross, G82 5JJ. Tel 01389 841351.**

Ringed Plover *David Mitchell*

SOC Conference weather

Paul Speak's remark (SBN 50: 12) about sitting in a darkened conference hall with bright sunshine outside brought back memories of snow, rain and gales at previous SOC conferences. I therefore took up his challenge, and looked back to the past. I understand that the first SOC conference was held around 1948. With Pamela's help, I tracked down the venues and dates of all conferences, both autumn and spring, back to 1968, ie 30 years. 1968 was, incidentally, the first time I attended a conference. Surprisingly, there was no archive available that gave easily accessible details. Perhaps this would be a task for the newly formed History Working Group?

The weather clearly depends upon the time of year. For more than 10 years, until 1973, autumn conferences took place at Dunblane at the end of October. The joys of camping were experienced by those who couldn't afford the Hydro's tariffs. I wonder how many delegates roughed it these days? *(the present editor certainly did!)* There was no conference in 1974, as the event was shifted forward to January 1975, at Stirling University. The end of January conference moved to the Marine Hotel at North Berwick in 1978. That year saw 2 events, as the autumn conference was reinstated, remaining at North Berwick. This turned out to be another longterm venue, for the conference was held here in either late October or early November until 1991, except for 1987 when it took place at Edinburgh University in mid September. With rising costs, it was decided then to move to Speyside, where the event was held at the same time of year in Aviemore until 1993, in Kingussie in 1995, and then Newtonmore until the present, although it once returned to North Berwick in 1994. Spring one day conferences began in 1985, mainly in mid March, although a spring weekend was held at Inverness in April 1980. Venues have varied, with local branches latterly responsible for the organisation. We have been to Edinburgh (twice), Aberdeen, Glasgow (twice), Inverness (twice), Crieff, Lockerbie, Ayr, Perth, Galashiels and St Andrews. The 1994 spring conference was cancelled due to lack of support.

October and November weather has mostly been relatively mild. Of the 26 conferences held at that period, 8 have been wet, especially those in 1970, 1972, 1981 and 1996. Significant overnight frost occurred on 5 occasions, all between 1985 and 1992. 8 were windy, while 10 were sunny, although whether during lectures was impossible to discover! Onshore gales dislodged masonry from the hotel at North Berwick in 1984, and snow fell at Aviemore in 1992.

The 4 January events were, not surprisingly, cold, with frost on 3 occasion. Two were wet, with snow twice, although these were also relatively sunny. The one September conference was warm and sunny with showers, but becoming windy.

March and April conferences have seen mixed weather, ranging from sunny and mild (St Andrews 1998 - the reason for this note!), to cold and snowy (Galashiels 1995) and windy (Lockerbie 1990). Of 14 conferences at this time of year, half were sunny.

So, Paul, pick the bones from that! Pamela has challenged me to predict the weather at Newtonmore this autumn (30 October - 2 November) and at Perth next year (13 March). All I can say is that she'll have to wait until 29 October and 12 March respectively!

Norman Elkins

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Glasgow

Dear Sir,

Wot no hyphens?

Your announced policy is not incompatible with Donald Stewart's view the June 1998 *SBN* page 15 since '.. except where essential...' provides the basis for agreement. As current Newsletter Editor of *Glasgow Natural History Society* I had recently to insert the necessary hyphen in a startling title submitted: '**a peanut eating Fox'!**

Happy editing!

Norman R Grist

REVIEWS

Pocket Guide to the Birds of Britain and North West Europe. *Published by Pica Press in association with the BTO. 1998. £11.95. 296pp. ISBN 1-873403-49-6.*

The appearance of yet another field guide shows the popularity of the subject but you still wonder when there will be one too many. However first impressions of this new BTO backed arrival are good. The book is chunky and certainly portable covering 380 species up to and including scarce migrants with birds depicted in varying plumages and attitudes plus distribution maps alongside. The text for each species is conveniently and concisely sectionalised to make reference easy. The pictures are clear and generally good but there are a number where the colour is less than true such as Ringed Plover, Dunlin (breeding plumage), Subalpine Warbler and Mandarin. Some may find it a disadvantage that southern Europe is omitted, an area much visited these days but overall the guide compares favourably with others in the same reasonably priced range.

Keith Macgregor

The Bird Collectors by Barbara and Richard Mearns. *Published by Academic Press. 1998. £34.95. 472pp. ISBN 0-12-487440-1*

In this well produced volume Barbara and Richard Mearns have reviewed the history of bird collecting from the time of James Cook right up to the present day. The greater part of the book provides accounts of the collectors, their diverse contributions to ornithology, their backgrounds, lifestyles and exploits. One can get some idea of the volume of research which was required to produce it by referring to 32 pages of bibliographical sources and references plus a very useful appendix listing the world's largest study skin collections. The text is enlivened by the inclusion of nearly 200 photographs depicting many of those intrepid explorers, some as portraits at home and others, more interestingly, out in the field

Some of the chapters recount the almost unimaginable rigours which the early travellers had to suffer in order to capture a new bird to science. One such example was Edward Nelson, who when travelling in western Alaska in 1881, paid Eskimo women (with plugs of tobacco) to sleep in his wet clothes so they would be dry in the morning! A chapter entitled Women in the Field includes our own pioneering Scottish ladies Evelyn Baxter and Leonora Rintoul. Another chapter on Human Casualties recounts the sometimes quite bizarre ways in which a number of collectors died or were seriously injured. One final example of what I suspect is a little known fact tells of how Professor Alfred Newton took the care of his precious egg collection to exceptional extremes; a confirmed misogynist he made sure that no woman ever laid eyes upon it!

Buy this book and enjoy it both for an entertaining read and as a work of reference.

David Clugston

Conservation comments

The SOC has commented on the following conservation issues over the last 2 years:

* Birds of prey
* Wild geese and agriculture
* Proposed Mussel farm on Loch Fyne
* Managing the Cairngorms
* Review and possible amendment of The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981
* Natural Heritage Designations Review
* Fife Biodiversity Action Plan
* EU Directive on the conservation of Habitats & Wild Flora & Fauna
* First & Second Tranche draft action plans – Common Scoter, Red-necked Phalarope & Wryneck
* West Lothian Biodiversity Action Plan:
* East of Scotland Water Strategy
* SNH European Habitats Directive: Natura 2000 Possible Special Areas of Conservation: Solway, Berwickshire, Islay, Berwickshire and Lanarkshire

Normally I, as President, reply on behalf of the SOC. However I often rely on members' expertise in forming my replies. In some cases we ask members to comment directly. We are most grateful to the many Club members who have helped in this work.

Ian Darling

REQUESTS

Breeding origins of Scottish Barnacle Geese - DNA samples required

At present, the Barnacle Geese wintering in Britain split neatly into 2 (*Sounds painful, Eds*). Those from Spitzbergen winter on the Solway and those from East Greenland in the Western Isles (especially Islay) and in Ireland.

Historical records suggest that some, perhaps all, of the Barnacle Geese on the Solway in the 19th century may have emanated from Greenland and this needs to be verified. We also wish to discover whether or not today's Islay and Solway birds are distinguishable. We aim to do this with DNA comparisons, firstly from museum material but present day samples are also necessary.

We would be most grateful if anyone with access to or finding dead Barnacle Geese anywhere in the UK would take a sample suitable for DNA analysis. A viable sample need not be large or difficult to obtain. Kills by raptors or underneath wires will suffice. A few feathers from the breast or flanks, together with some tissue or blood will suffice. The sample should be individually wrapped in soft paper (toilet or kitchen roll is ideal) and placed in an envelope with the finding details. Postage will be refunded, and all contributions acknowledged.

Hugh Boyd and John Young, 11 Restenneth Place, Lunanhead, Forfar, Angus. DD8 3NF

Concern for Swifts (Scotland)

Last year we launched the *Concern for Swifts Scotland* project and Glasgow District Council Housing Department agreed to adopt a policy of protecting Swift nest sites. Since then I have agreed a detail for new build housing with the architects and am waiting for the repair programme for this year so that any adjustments to details can be made. The SWT training team at Maryhill are making up a trial run of nestboxes to see how many can be got out of a sheet of exterior plywood. The first sheet and other material were paid for by RSPB, so that the first batch could be made up and enable us to put a cost to the boxes. The boxes are being made up to the Hirsel pattern but there is room for experiment both on the size of the box and on the size of the entrance. I should like to try an experiment

with window ledge boxes for tenements, so if you live on a top storey, or know anyone who does and would like to experiment with Swift boxes, please let me know. I have built up a picture of Swift colonies in part of Glasgow. It would be nice if some of you could let me know where you noticed Swifts this summer, and equally importantly, where you noticed no Swifts. For example it was interesting to note a complete lack of Swifts around the Merchant City and Glasgow Green - where the existence of older properties and the green and the river as feeding sites would have led me to expect Swifts.

Please reply to **Clare Darlaston, 287 Onslow Drive, Dennistoun, Glasgow G31 2QG. Tel 0141 554 8262**

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See *SBN* 50

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RSPB move

The RSPB has been the Club's tenant on the upper floors of 21 Regent Terrace since 1990. From mid July they have moved to a new office at **Dunedin House, 25 Ravelston Terrace, Edinburgh EH4 3TP Tel. 0131 311 6500.** We are sorry to see them go but wish them well in their new office.
Council will be looking at the future use of No 21 and the various options open to the Club.

Ian Darling

Spring 1999 SOC/BTO Conference

Tayside branch confirm that the 1999 spring conference will be held at the Battleby Centre, near Perth on 13 March 1999. The conference will concentrate on birds associated with the glens and higher ground of Tayside. An outing to some of the Perthshire hotspots will take place the following day.

SOC NOTICES

With this issue

Enlcosed with this issue are the *Scottish Bird Report, Raptor Round Up,* winter meetings programme, winter excursions, Report of Council/Accounts and Conference programme

Valerie Thom

We are very sorry to report that Valerie, an Honorary President and former editor of both *Scottish Birds* and *Scottish Bird News,* as well as the author of *Birds in Scotland*, died in May.

Valerie has generously left the SOC her extensive library of natural history books, paintings, the copyright and royalties from *Birds in Scotland* and the *Collins Guide to Scotland's Birds* and a generous legacy. A full obituary will appear in the December *Scottish Birds.*

Photographic competition

Entries for this year's competition should be sent to **21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh no later than 1st October 1997.** Subjects must be wild birds photographed in Scotland with the appropriate licences as required. They should be clearly marked with photographers name, the species, and locality. All entries will be returned as soon as possible after the conference.

Endowment Fund Grants for 1999

If you would like to apply for a grant for 1999 to assist with a study please ask for an application form from **SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.** Applications must be received by 31st October

200 Club

Winners in the second quarter of 1998 were:
April - 1st £30 - V M Thom, Perth; 2nd £20 M C Lawrie, Troon; 3rd £10 - J S Wilson, Glasgow.
May - 1st £50 - S Howe, Torphins; 2nd £30 B A Brown, Edinburgh; 3rd £20 D S Omand, Caithness; 4th £10 R S Smith, Dorchester.
June 1st £30 - G S Riddle, Culzean; 2nd £20 - M M Draper, Glasgow; 3rd £10 B Pirie, Aberdeen.

In the 200 Club's eighth year, which ended on 31 May, £1095 was returned in prizes and the SOC benefited similarly. All members are warmly thanked for their continued support. Any SOC member, over 18, wishing to join now for the rest of the 'year' can send me a cheque for £9, payable to 'SOC 200 Club', which will be gratefully acknowledged.
Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NL (Tel 01896 822176).

Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club. It is published 4 times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices need to be sent to the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace no later than 5 weeks before publication. The magazine acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and to disseminate information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. The views expressed in articles in *Scottish Bird News* are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication. The SOC also publishes the journal *Scottish Birds* which publishes original papers and notes on Scottish ornithology and the *Scottish Bird Report.* For details of these publications and membership contact the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT.

Outer Hebrides Bird Report 1997

with 1992-1996 additions. The latest editon of this report was recently published and is available from **Brian Rabbitts, 6 Carinish, Lochmaddy, North Uist HS6 5HL.**

Scottish Ringer's Conference 1998

This will be held at the Fife Arms Hotel, Braemar from 13-15 November. The conference is, as usual, open to all. Further details from **Iain Livingstone 57 Strathview Road, Bellshill, Lanarkshire ML4 2UY. Tel 01698 749844.**

SOC Annual Conference

The 1998 Annual Conference will be at the Balavil Sport Hotel, Newtonmore over the weekend 30 October - 1 November 1998. Further details are enclosed with this mailing.

Discussion Group 1998

The South East Scotland Discussion Group meets monthly in the Library at 21 Regent Terrace at 7.30pm. The dates for 1998 are: September 2; October 7; November 4; and December 2.

Thanks to

Once again, many thanks to the volunteers who came in to Regent Terrace to assist in sending out the June mailing. They were: Frank Hamilton, Neville Crowther, Bob & Betty Smith, Sue Goode, Rosemary Davidson, Cath Craig and Joan Wilcox.

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